# Dissent

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# After the Election

## PLAN B

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ARGUMENTS

**SEAN WILENTZ, TODD GITLIN, AND ELLEN WILLIS DISAGREE ABOUT RALPH NADER AND THE GREENS**

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ROBERT SHOGAN

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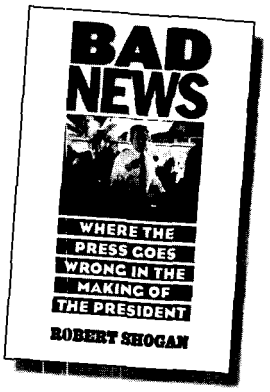


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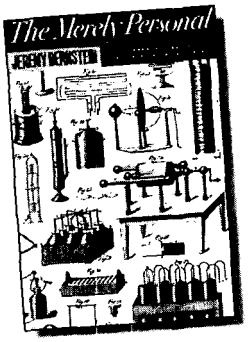


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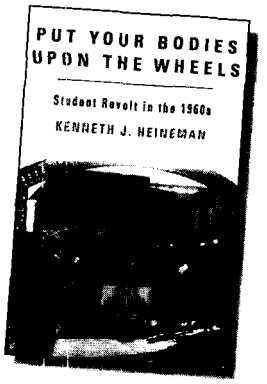


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# Editor's Page

WE DEVOTE this issue almost entirely to American politics, looking back to the disputed presidential election and forward to the administration of Bush II. The mix of articles is incomplete; we can't cover everything at once. But the pieces add up; they make for some necessary self-reflection. The rest of the world, for the moment, is slighted. ■ There are four points that we begin to address here, and will continue to deal with. First, the most extraordinary fact about the election and the current political scene is that half the people are absent. The two parties have agreed among themselves to compete for 51 percent of 50 percent of the electorate. But the left should not accept that agreement, just as we should not make our peace with the more general decline in political participation and organizational membership. Who are these people who have withdrawn from, or declined to enter, or (as Ruth Rosen suggests) been excluded from the political arena? In the book section, Tom Edsall provides a useful, and sure to be disputed, account of the actual electorate. We also need to think about the potential electorate. ■ Second, an election that produced a statistical tie might be expected to lead to a centrist, assiduously bipartisan government. But I am fairly sure, and most of our writers agree, that Bush II will construct a centrist façade and serve as a front for a hard-right administration. His proposed tax cut is one of the purest pieces of class interest legislation that we have seen for years. And look for a sustained and serious campaign against the labor movement, which was Bush's most effective opponent last November. Would that the Democratic champions of "working Americans" had similar courage in defense of their presumably different convictions! ■ Third, the courage of the Democrats is a real issue. They will continue to be strongly tempted to play the bipartisan game. But what we most need at this moment is partisan politics. The country is deeply divided, and the Democratic half probably has the greater chance for growth over the next decades. Al Gore's voters came from segments of the population (new immigrants, for example) likely to expand. But to seize this opportunity, the party has to play for bigger stakes than 51 percent of 50 percent. ■ Fourth, the Greens made a difference, and so we have to rejoin the old leftist debate about third parties, as Sean Wilentz, Todd Gitlin, and Ellen Willis do with admirable energy. Because of the difference the Greens made, they may not be much of a factor in 2004. After four years of Republican environmentalism, any Democrat is likely to look good. Still, given the current leadership and programmatic posture of the Democratic Party, the question of thirdness won't go away.

M.W.



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Dissent

Spring 2001

**Editor's Page**
Michael Walzer
1

**After the Election: Plan B**
Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore on politics and piety, 5
Jennifer Baumgardner on why "W" doesn't stand for women, 12
Jeff Faux on Alan Greenspan, 15 ▪ David Brody on the NLRB, 18
James K. Galbraith on civic disrespect, 23 ▪ Philip Green on legends of the election, 26 ▪ Michael Kazin on the higher immorality, 2000, 31
Patricia Cayo Sexton on the dollar and its dilemmas, 34 ▪ Douglas W. Payne on the arms trade, 38 ▪ Ruth Rosen on civil death, 44
Benjamin Ross on California's power debacle and the free market, 45
Jackie Smith on cyber subversion, 48

**Brave New Globe**
Alice H. Amsden and Takashi Hikino ask how U.S. military and economic policies mesh, 53

**Politics Abroad**
Bogdan Denitch finds little to be hopeful about in the Balkans, 55
Forrest D. Colburn looks at big Vicente Fox and a little Mexican village, 57

**Articles**
The Road (Not?) Taken
*Anthony Giddens, the Third Way, and the Future of Social Democracy*
Jeffrey C. Isaac
61

The Mauling of Public Space
Margaret Kohn
71

Lepers at the City Gate
*Single Room Occupancy and the Housing Crisis*
Andy Merrifield
78

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Kilroy in Dresden
Nicholas Howe
85

**Arguments**

Todd Gitlin and Sean Wilentz criticize those who supported Ralph Nader, and Ellen Willis responds, 93

**Notebook**

David Carroll Cochran on multiculturalism, 101

**Books**

Thomas Byrne Edsall on Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers's *America's Forgotten Majority*, 103
Corey Robin on Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*, 108
Russell Jacoby on *C. Wright Mills, Letters and Autobiographical Writing*, ed. Kathryn Mills with Pamela Mills, 112
George Scialabba on G.A. Cohen's *If You're an Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* and Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 115
Benjamin Kunkel on Andrei Platonov's *The Fierce and Beautiful World*, 118

**Letters**

124

**The Last Page**

Junius
128

*Dissent* (ISSN 0012-3846), issued April 1, 2001, is published quarterly—winter, spring, summer, and fall—by the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas, Inc., 310 Riverside Drive, #1201, New York, N.Y. 10025. Phone: 212-316-3120. Web site: http://www.dissentmagazine.org. E-mail: for new subscriptions: orders_dissent@fulcoinc.com; for subscription inquiries: custsvc_dissent@fulcoinc. com; for editorial and all other inquiries: editors@dissentmagazine.org. Address for subscriptions: *Dissent*, Subscription Services Department, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834-3000. Subscriptions: $22.00 for one year; $40.00 for two years; $17.00 for students for one year; foreign subscriptions, including Canada, add $7.00 for mailing costs per year; institutional rate $34.00 per year, $58.00 for two years; single copy $7.50. All payments from foreign countries must be made by U.S. money orders or checks payable in U.S. currency. For special rates on bulk orders from organizations, teachers, etc., write directly to *Dissent* . For information on newsstand and bookstore distribution write to: Eastern News Distributors, Inc., One Media Way, 12406 Rt. 250, Milan, Ohio 44846-9705; phone: 1-800-221-3148. **Postmaster**: Send address changes to *Dissent*, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, N.J. 07834-3000. © 2001 by the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas, Inc. (FSISI). Permission to reprint any article must be obtained from the publishers. **Manuscripts** will not be considered unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. Volume 48, Number 2 (whole No. 202). Made in U.S.A. ISSN 0012-3846. *Dissent* does not engage in lobbying or support candidates or legislation. Opinions expressed in signed articles and editorials are entirely those of the authors. Cover designs by Daniel McClain. *Dissent* is indexed in *Academic Abstracts*, the Alternative Press Index, the Infotrak Academic Index, Left Index, *Magazine Article Summaries*, the *PAIS Bulletin*, University Microfilms, Inc. (UMI), the *Social Sciences Index*, the *Social Science Source*, and *Sociological Abstracts*. *Dissent* is a member of the Independent Press Association.

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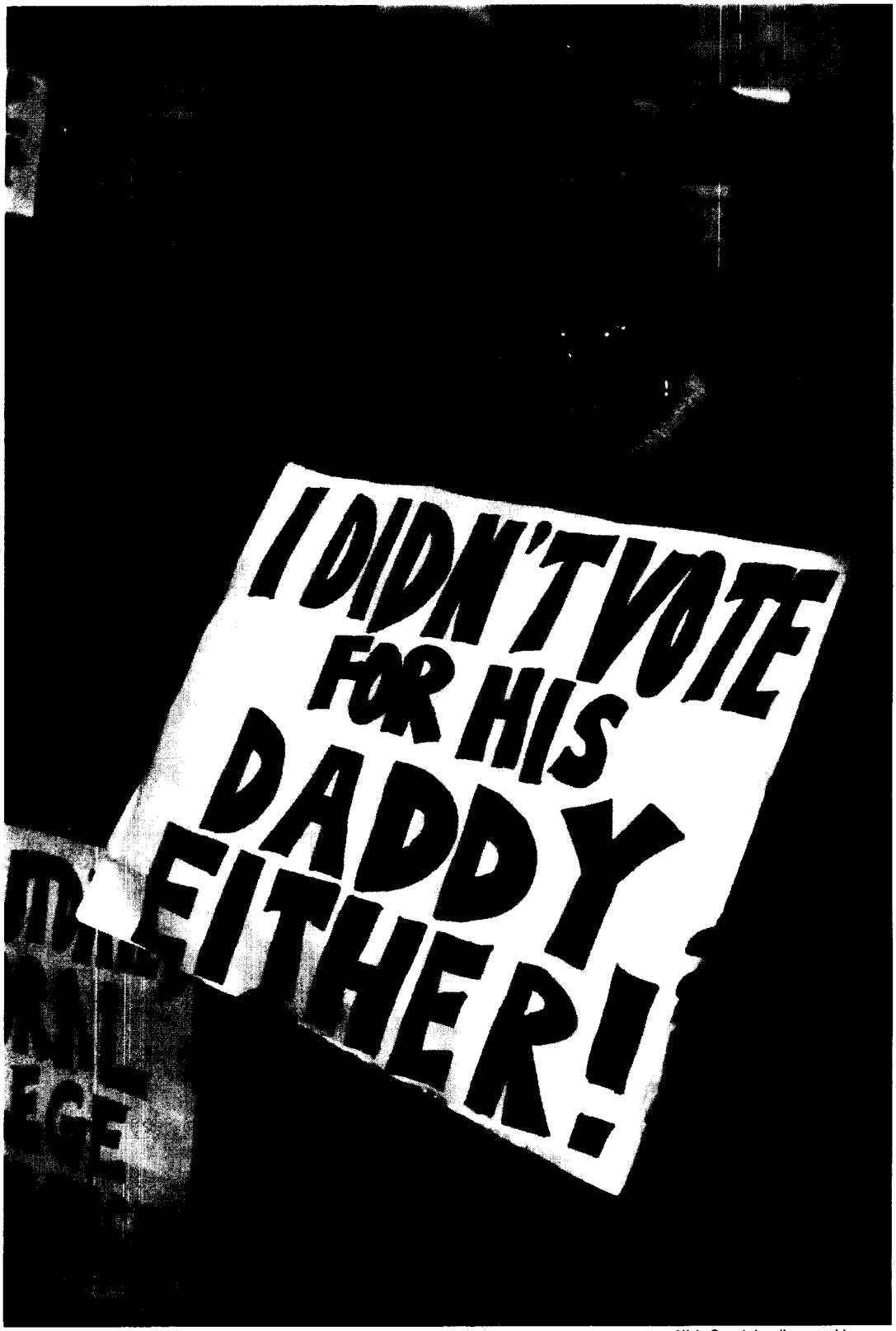


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# Politics and Piety

**Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore**

AMERICA IS a secular society nervous with its secularism. Since the nation's founding, that nervousness has manifested itself in periodic redrawing of the boundary between church and state and in practices that compromise the "wall of separation." Today, however, the conventional wisdom about religion in public life goes like this: because of an absolutist division between pulpit and public square, pew and polling place, religion is everywhere on the defensive. It is tolerated, even lauded, as a personal or private matter, appropriate for the home, the church, the synagogue, or mosque, but (regrettably) considered inappropriate for the public spaces of civic life. In contemporary America, religion is marginalized and prevented from playing its beneficent role by a misguided, overly zealous commitment to separation. Stephen Carter, the Yale Law School professor, articulates this lament: "In our sensible zeal to keep religion from dominating our politics, we have created a political and legal culture that presses the religiously faithful to be other than themselves, to act publicly, and sometime privately as well, as though their faith does not matter to them."

This conventional wisdom is flat-out wrong. Far from being excluded from the public square, religion is ubiquitous in American life; it permeates our politics now as it has in the past. There is a long history in America of religious influence on public life and policy. No one excluded religious discourse from the debate over slavery. No one excluded religion from influencing temperance legislation, or from shaping the social conscience of the Progressive movement, or from justifying each and every instance of American imperialism. Religion was a crucial force in molding our cold war mentality and in convincing America in the 1950s and 1960s to rid itself finally of Jim Crow.

Americans today, compared to Europeans, are pious in public and proud of it. Most city councils across the country begin deliberations with an invocation, as does the U. S. Senate. In the South, many public schools still begin with prayer. And is there a baseball, football, or basketball team left in America that doesn't before or after its game bow heads and join hands? Is there a presidential address from the Oval Office that doesn't conclude by invoking God? Public piety may be the only thing that connects liberal African-American Democrats with conservative white Republicans.

We know from every cross-national opinion poll that Americans are the most religious people in the industrialized world. Some 94 percent of Americans say they believe in God; in Britain the figure is 68 percent. Seventy percent of Americans say they pray daily; 20 percent of the English say they do. Approximately 40 percent of Americans claim to attend a religious service weekly; in Britain and Germany the figure is 10 percent; in France, 15 percent. When asked if they find their religious beliefs important to their personal lives, 86 percent of Americans say yes compared to 49 percent in Britain. And recently, in a question prompted by the arrival of the new millennium, one out of every four American adults polled said they believed Jesus would return to earth before they died.

Whether or not this professed devotion to religion translates into deep spiritual feeling, it certainly explains religion's continued presence in public life, especially in American politics. Religiosity is linked to citizenship, to the very concept of Americanism. Imagine, if you will, a candidate for Congress, the Senate, or the presidency acknowledging publicly that he

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or she was an atheist—and then being elected.

Thomas Jefferson, the infamous Deist, would fare poorly at the polls today. Although a very large number of all Americans, 65 percent, say they belong to some religious group, a whopping 95 percent of the members of Congress claim religious affiliation. You have to appear to be religious to succeed in politics.

So pervasive is public piety in our politics that Newt Gingrich, before his conversion to statesmanship, introduced a proposal for a school prayer amendment by arguing that it would produce "an America in which a belief in the Creator is once again at the center of being an American." Even those who opposed the amendment did not challenge that statement. So ordinary and normal is the connection of Americanism and belief (usually just Christian belief) that there was little public notice, let alone outcry, when in the 1996 presidential campaign five Republican candidates spoke at a rally in Memphis that began with this flag salute: "I pledge allegiance to the Christian flag, and to the savior, for whose kingdom it stands, one savior, crucified, risen, and coming again, with life and liberty for all who believe."

In the recent presidential race, God did very well. The public square reverberated with talk about him, as if only believers can be good presidents, as if presidents are chosen to be defenders of the faith, not defenders of the Constitution. As the candidates lined up to testify to their religious faith, they appeared not to know that the Constitution in Article 6, Clause 3, expressly provided that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office." George W. Bush consistently performed on the stump as someone who had proclaimed over the years that "my faith tells me that the acceptance of Jesus Christ as my savior is my salvation and I believe that." He no longer said, as he had in 1993, that people who did not accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior could not go to heaven. Still, he boasted of reading the Bible daily. When asked what thinker had most influenced his life, he said, "Jesus."

God was also alive and well in the Democratic Party. Al Gore let everyone know, more than once, that he was a born-again Christian and said that whenever he faced a tough decision he asked himself, "What would Jesus do?" (Attending multimillion dollar soft-money galas in Hollywood apparently did not count as a tough decision.) Gore had little choice last year. Pollsters told him that he was in electoral trouble with religious America and so forced him to say something about Jesus. What else could a politician do when he learned that 40 percent of Americans thought that the Republican Party "shared America's fundamental faith in God," whereas only 18 percent said the Democrats did? What indeed would Jesus have done to get rid of the memory of Monica Lewinsky?

Enter Joseph Lieberman. As William Safire put it in the best one-liner of the campaign, it took a Jewish Hail Mary pass to keep the Democrats in the game. But in Gore's choice of Lieberman, the key factor was not his Jewishness, but his unassailable, unembarrassed religiosity. In his debut appearance on August 8 with Gore in Nashville, Lieberman mentioned God thirteen times in ninety seconds. One hopes the Guinness people were nearby. This was a record. More convincingly than the religious right ever had, Lieberman managed to quiet American nervousness about the place of religion in our politics. This was a shame.

There is nothing wrong with religious faith shaping one's political views, although it might have been more credible had Lieberman's deep religious faith moved him to champion the Old Testament's prophetic call for repairing the world, for working to improve the lot of the poor, or for turning swords into plowshares. Instead, that faith shaped his attacks on Sodom and Gomorrah—Hollywood and New York. Lieberman suggested even more strongly than his counterpart, Dick Cheney, that only a religious people can be a moral people. If so, one wonders why less religious Europeans take better care of their poor, their children, and their elderly, and devote a higher percentage of their budgets to repairing the social fabric than Americans do. Lieberman used his political opportunity to call upon Americans "as a people" to "reaffirm our faith and renew the dedication of our nation and ourselves to God


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and God's purpose." His call mirrored George W. Bush's statement that "our nation is chosen by God and commissioned by history to be a model to the world." And it wasn't all that different from Senator John Ashcroft's absurd claim at Bob Jones University that the slogan of some religious revolutionaries, "'We have no King but Jesus,' found its way into the fundamental documents of this country."

We may be certain of one thing about the 2000 presidential election: God had no hand in the outcome. Politics is an affair of mortals, as the writers of the American Constitution wisely suggested. God's Creation may be messy, but we have to descend very far down the great chain of being before we come to the butterfly ballots, chads, and split judicial decisions that suggest even advanced democracies have trouble recording the will of the people. The infamous and utterly secular five-to-four decision handed down by the Supreme Court in *Bush v. Gore* at least had the virtue of reminding us of how distant we are from the doctrine of rule by divine right.

The American Constitution is a godless document. In its failure to mention God, or to evoke God's protection, or to pledge the federal government to God's will, it broke with all past models for written political documents, including the Declaration of Independence, the constitutions of the various state governments, and the Articles of Confederation. It separated church and state with the intention of beginning an era when a person's religious convictions or lack thereof would have no bearing on his fitness to assume public office. However, almost as soon as Americans took the revolutionary step of separating the purposes of government from the will of God, they began to look for ways to fudge their resolve.

Religious politics in fact began with the men who proclaimed American secularism in the strongest terms, and any hope we have to reform present practices must acknowledge the compromises they were willing to make. The religious persuasion of the men who wrote the Constitution and who launched the American Republic remains a subject of debate. About the spiritual practices of some of them we know many things, but most left little evidence of their devotional habits beyond an uncertainly ascribed denominational affiliation. The fact that religion does not figure much in accounts of their lives argues for secularism. On the other hand, any surmise we make about the religious beliefs of eighteenth-century Americans must begin with the fact that to all of them, some idea of God was important. The founders are best collectively described as humanists rather than partisan Christians, but they rested humanism on the premise that men and women were created by a Supreme Being who built a clear moral purpose into the order of things. That moral purpose was open to discovery by human reason and provided a guideline for all areas of human behavior.

None of the founders who left a record of their religious convictions resemble the evangelical preachers who in the antebellum period divided the United States into a labyrinth of competing faiths and brought the majority of Americans into formal affiliation with a religious denomination. The founders, however, aware of the splintered religious allegiances of Americans, sought to protect religion by making theological disagreement politically irrelevant. They knew about the ancient grievances that set Protestants against Catholics and about the discrimination imposed upon people who did not choose to make the Christian cross the symbol of salvation. Their intention in writing the Constitution was to give equal credibility to all religions and, at the same time, to disarm the violence that religious grievances had historically wreaked upon civil society. In its religious clauses and in all its other features, the American Constitution was an effort to overcome the predictable effects of discord.

Among the favorite words of the founders was Harmony. As that concept bore on their personal religious affairs, it made them less doctrinaire than the ministers of the various faiths to which they adhered. The men who took prominent political roles in the early republic—Washington, Adams, Hamilton, Jay, Jefferson, Madison among them—all ascribed to religion a good, in fact vital, role in perpetuating a democratic society. They were not in our contemporary sense celebrants of religious pluralism. Searching for formulas to overcome

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selfish group interests, they envisioned a republican citizenry united in common moral practice based on general religious principles. They loathed religious controversy even when political circumstances placed them in the middle of it. Jefferson, like Washington, could not escape his religious critics. The partisan attacks on both men for their lack of religious fervor strengthened their own conviction, shared apparently by most voters of their time, that religious bickering was a private matter, that it belonged outside the realm of state affairs.

Yet the idea of a secular public realm remained a divisive concept, open to many interpretations. One influential group of critics was furious about the omission of God from the Constitution; from the first day of the new government, they blamed every woe that beset the American nation on that slight to Christianity. The no-religious-test clause in Article 6 of the Constitution upset many delegates in state ratifying conventions, especially since eleven of the original thirteen states had clauses in their own constitutions restricting officeholding to Protestants. They noted that unless it was deleted, "papists, pagans and Jews might be at the helm" of the national government. This complaint never entirely disappeared. Even the founders who came closest to approving Jefferson's famous gloss on the religious clauses of the First Amendment, that it established a wall of separation between church and state, regularly incorporated into their public addresses phrases about the need to seek God's protection and guidance.

In his Farewell Address, Washington explicitly linked public and private morality to religious belief. He inserted into his oath of office the phrase "so help me God," a phrase not in the Constitution, and swore his oath upon a Bible, a practice not mentioned in the Constitution. He proclaimed a national Day of Thanksgiving to seek God's blessing for the American nation and mentioned God prominently in his two inaugural addresses. Most of these practices have been followed by most of our presidents, including Jefferson and Madison. Yet Washington, also in 1792, tried to assure American Catholics that in this republic religious disputes would never be carried to such a pitch as to endanger their consciences or the peace of society. He did not, of course, live to witness the sorry ways in which partisan politics, at the state and national level, scapegoated American Catholics from the 1840s until the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960. Washington, a man of rational temperament who believed that moral conduct pleased God and brought the blessings of Providence upon the community, imagined a political order free of both political parties and religious quarrels. He did not hesitate to remind Americans of the importance of God (referred to in the most generalized terms) in human affairs. But he never claimed that his administration was in any particular policy trying to carry out God's platform.

As it turned out, the irenic balance that Washington and others imagined—between, on the one hand, a constitutional order that distinguished the City of God from the City of Man and, on the other, a proper respect for God in the political arena—was impossible to maintain. From the beginning, we have had a peculiar national history of divine give and take that has encouraged both a language of extreme secularism and recurring efforts to write God into the Constitution. Timothy Dwight, an early chaplain at Yale, attributed the successful British bombardment of Washington during the War of 1812 to American irreligion in general and to God's absence from the Constitution in particular. The linkage of American calamity with its godless Constitution energized a national crusade in the midst of the Civil War to pass what became known as the Christian Amendment. Led by the great preacher Horace Bushnell from Connecticut, hundreds of Protestant ministers convened two national conventions in 1863 that blamed the bloodshed of the Civil War on God's vindictive punishment, not for slavery but for the Constitution's godlessness. They urged an amendment to the Constitution, changing its preamble to

> We, the people of the United States, humbly acknowledging Almighty God as the source of all authority and power in civil government, the Lord Jesus Christ as the Governor among the


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> Nations, and His revealed will as of supreme authority, in order to constitute a Christian government, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Lincoln, whose speeches referred to God almost as often as Senator Lieberman's, refused to endorse the Christian Amendment. Baptists, Catholics, Jews, Seventh Day Adventists, and Unitarians opposed it as well, and it never made its way through Congress. The Constitution, America's fundamental law, would remain secular, but in that same year, 1863, perhaps to appease the nervous Protestant ministers, the words "In God We Trust," were put on our money, then certainly much less venerated than the Constitution. God is in our wallets but not in our founding text.

Six more times, four in the twentieth century, efforts were made to amend the Constitution by adding reference to God to its preamble, and six more times God was kept out. The most recent failed attempt occurred in the 1950s, in the early years of the cold war, even as Americans were defining themselves as the godly champion of freedom against "godless atheistic communism." And once again as they kept their Constitution godless, some Americans, nervous at the affront, chose to place God in a less fundamental part of American public life, this time in the Pledge of Allegiance, where America became "one nation under God."

The Constitution, however, remains godless, and with it the reminder to all politicians that a political campaign is not a good place to discuss one's religion, if religion really deserves special respect. God is not running for public office, and God doesn't care who wins. Evoking God's name in partisan gatherings usually amounts either to political pandering or to unpardonable arrogance.

OUR NATIONAL history nonetheless suggests that some office seekers will reflect (or exploit) the national nervousness about the bold secularism of our political system. We want to find ways to assure ourselves that having a secular political system is not the same thing as having a society that has abandoned God. The trouble is that this nervousness too often results in awarding God a kind of booby prize. A God who is too exalted to be named in our Constitution does not really belong on our currency or in our flag salute.

That God is named in these two places and also invoked in the prayers that begin congressional and Supreme Court sessions is a compromise that might or might not have passed muster with Washington, Jefferson, and Madison. Nonetheless, these booby prizes for God signal an uncertainty about secularism that turns religion from time to time into a partisan matter. Office seekers play upon our nervousness. And then, the line between a sincere profession of faith and political pandering blurs, and the notion that religion should not be a test of office flies out the window. The question that should have been put to all the candidates in the year 2000 was whether they believed atheists should be attacked for their anti-religious views if one of them dared to run for president.

Religious politics works best in this country when it manages to clear itself of partisan politics. The religious appeals of abolitionists during the 1840s and 1850s and the religious rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr., during the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s are different from efforts made by the Christian Coalition to take over the Republican Party. That said, however, it remains extremely difficult to figure out how we can use religious resources in public life in nonpartisan ways. During the most controversial period of the civil rights struggle, after all, King's speeches bolstered the liberal wing of the Democratic Party more than any other political interest. If we remain strictly true to the American Constitution, we ought to insist that government policy should never be determined by a religious claim. However, the American Constitution also protects free speech and ensures that religious voices may make whatever arguments they want in political contests or in the halls of Congress. And if we pay attention to what the first generation of American politicians actually did and to the patterns of American history since, we learn that secularist zealotry is counterproductive and that the elimination of religion from public life is not an option.

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We will venture a prediction. The sort of nonproductive religious boasting that has been so much a part of the American political scene since the Reverend Jerry Falwell first proposed a Moral Majority will fade away, at least for a time. It will fade because the majority of American voters don't like it and are increasingly willing to punish presidential candidates who try to run with God. Al Gore's spiritual professions could not carry his home state of Tennessee. And although George W. Bush undoubtedly got some help from the Christian Coalition, history will record that he lost the election. Most religious groups are acutely aware of how little they gain from placing God on the political hustings.

However, one legacy of the last twenty years of political God talk will continue to weigh on public policy decisions and, not incidentally, to divide Americans along religious lines. Influential sections of both political parties seem to have accepted the notion that religion can solve some of America's biggest social problems. It can solve the problem of crime. It can solve the problem of education. It can solve the problem of poverty. We may hear fewer claims in the future that America is a Christian nation, which it most assuredly is not, but we will hear a great deal more about government partnerships with faith-based charities and schools. Congress and the Supreme Court are poised to rethink the lines that have been drawn between church and state.

American liberals must react with something more than cries of horror, remembering that it was they who were angry in 1986 when conservatives tried to keep religious conviction out of the public square, and William Simon, Ronald Reagan's secretary of the treasury, worked feverishly and unsuccessfully to stop the National Conference of Catholic Bishops from issuing its encyclical letter on economic justice. Polls consistently show that people at the low end of the economic scale—whites, African-Americans, and Hispanics—view churches as valuable resources in community struggles against crime, drugs, and illiteracy. Our secular nation has always granted churches tax exemption, a financial contribution to religion that has never been held to violate the non-establishment clause of the First Amendment. From one perspective tax exemption is a notorious exception. We do not allow a local government to give one dollar to support a minister's salary, but we give churches the much greater boon of tax-free property. From another perspective, however, the exception makes perfect sense as public policy. Like universities and other secular eleemosynary institutions, churches perform public services before or beyond converting people to particular religious beliefs. They feed the poor. They build hospitals. They create institutions for the infirm and elderly. The more of these services they provide, the more religion contributes to the general public welfare.

The proposals for government endorsement of religious work will surely multiply, but we will here confine ourselves to a brief consideration of President Bush's opening of a White House office to promote faith-based charities and social services. Any measure to promote social justice deserves attention, although there is surely reason to be cautious in this case—in fact, three reasons. The first has to do with the wisdom of separating religious institutions from their specifically religious missions, a separation that the First Amendment requires in any government-financed, church-managed program. The second has to do with encouraging churches to compete for public funding, a potentially unspiritual competition that will inevitably produce more government money for some religious institutions than for others. The third is the most important reason and goes back to the concerns of the founders: to enlist God in the cause of making human government work better may finish both by demeaning God, subjecting churches to the charge of inadequacy and failure, and bringing out the worst behavior from religious men and women. It is absolutely wrong for government to use its money to entice churches to change their social mission into enterprises for which they lack expertise.

We already have some experience with the Charitable Choice provision of the Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act of 1996, the intention of which was to encourage charitable giving and to make it easier for


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the government to enter into contracts with churches to provide social services more extensive than the usual charity of religious groups. By far most charitable activity sponsored by religious groups has to do with feeding the poor and handing out used clothing. Nonetheless, the totally untested assumption of Charitable Choice was that faith-based institutions were better able to get people off drugs, out of prison, and into regular jobs than secular agencies. John Ashcroft's sponsorship of the legislation made liberals nervous, but it passed with bipartisan support. Lieberman backed the original legislation as firmly as he has endorsed the more recent Bush plan. There were of course rules governing these contractual relations between church and state. The issue was pragmatism. Did the program work and were the rules for determining success applied equally to religious and secular agencies? In running a drug program, a church did not have to move out of its building, or strip the walls of religious symbolism, or never mention God. However, it was enjoined not to proselytize and to make sure that any religious participation was entirely voluntary and not a requirement for the services it provided.

Implementation in some parts of the country was predictably lax, and a number of cases hit the courts. Texas, for example, gave $8,000 to the Jobs Partnership of Washington County that required participants to study Scripture and taught them "to find employment through a relationship with Jesus Christ." Less predictable than the litigation has been the reluctance of many churches to climb on board the program. In the first few years after the passage of Charitable Choice, churches did not pick up the available public money. The largest church charities in the United States, organized by Catholics, Methodists, and Jews, continued to run their operations without claiming that they could take on a major role in solving America's social problems. Smaller church agencies were apt to take the attitude of a local group in Ithaca, New York: we can provide a free lunch for the poor but we cannot do much about the circumstances that bring these people to our door.

A cynical view of the Bush program, which expands corporate deductions for charitable giving and eases the regulations that restrict religious activity in government-funded, faith-based charities would hold that it seeks to shrink government, with tax benefits for the rich, by making patsies of the nation's churches. Interestingly, research by Mark Chaves of the University of Arizona suggests that American churches with conservative theological and political profiles are less likely to reach for government money or to invest much in charity than liberal churches. Liberals, after all, are more conditioned to expect great things from government, though in this case they ought to think carefully about the implications of failure. Bush's plan might yield some important benefits to black communities, simply by making more money available to institutions with a long history of providing a range of services beyond spiritual counseling. Whether that makes up for the unseemly prospect of the Church of Scientology also benefiting substantially is another matter. But in no eventuality will the churches save the cities.

LET'S ASSUME that experience will quickly lead to the scaling back of rhetoric and expectations. Is there any reason not to give John DiIulio and Stephen Goldsmith, who are spearheading the president's initiative, the chance to show what faith-based institutions may more moderately provide, within parameters that do not destroy the establishment clause of the First Amendment? Neither man holds the extreme views associated with the religious right. A lot depends on what the Bush administration means by easing regulations. In its 1988 *Bowen v. Kendrick* decision, the Supreme Court laid down appropriate guidelines for assessing the constitutionality of federal grants to religious organizations providing social services. Written by the Court's bare conservative majority, these guidelines held that funded agencies cannot limit their services to people affiliated with any particular denomination; that the services provided cannot be religious in character; that there should be no substantial risk that the aid results in religious indoctrination; that religious institutions must not be the sole or primary beneficiaries of the legislation; and that any arguable effect of ad-

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vancing religion must be "incidental or remote."

America's largest religious charities have for years carried out their mission in ways that satisfy these requirements. Without question, however, there is a problem in umpiring a broader range of social services when an important reason why many churches claim success in working with drug addicts and criminals is that they convert people. They provide people with beliefs that don't solve their material problems but may give dignity and meaning to their lives. So we quickly run up against a dilemma. Why should the government do anything to discourage churches from trying to help people by converting them? Yet any truly constitutional program for government assistance to church social services will do precisely that.

Unless, of course, you fudge the rules and hope that the Supreme Court will change its 1988 resolve. If that happens, then we have reaped the worst of what this season of partisan religious politics has always threatened. We will have destroyed any pretense of the secularism of the American state and put it in the business of promoting religion, of interfering with religion, and, ultimately, of favoring by its financial largesse one group of churches over another. All of which, liberals should insist, is not what the founders intended. ●

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# Why 'W' Doesn't Stand for Women

**Jennifer Baumgardner**

ON JANUARY 31, less than two weeks after George W. Bush became the forty-third president of the United States of America, the Six Rivers Planned Parenthood in Eureka, California, was fielding calls from worried patients. The clinic is nestled near the Oregon border, just north of a breathtaking Redwood forest, and is the only abortion provider within a hundred miles. Although the Six Rivers area is fairly conservative politically, California itself has a strong majority of pro-choice representatives. My writing partner, Amy Richards, and I were interviewing staff at abortion clinics, gathering data as we traveled around the country on a book tour. We wanted to figure out how to bridge the gap between patients and politicians, with the hope that, armed with knowledge of what Americans really want, we could reinforce the will of the pro-choice-but-passive legislators who are as responsible as the conservatives for encroachments on abortion rights. Clinics, even those that do not provide abortions, are already political spaces, whether clients realize it or not. Thus, another aim we had was to see how the clinic could be used as an organizing space, much like women's bookstores and certain kinds of churches tend to be.

Clinics house many contradictions—or at least complexities. For example, polls show the majority of Americans to be pro-choice. We might assume, then, that the thirteen thousand clients who pass through the Six Rivers clinic are part of that majority. The truth is that many people who use services such as those offered at Six Rivers (contraception, prenatal care, Pap smears, and testing for sexually transmitted diseases [STDs], as well as abortion) probably don't vote, just as 50 percent of the eligible electorate does not vote. Further, even among those who do make it to the polls, there's no guarantee that they vote for pro-choice candidates or even link the clinic's existence with pro-choice representation and policies.


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Our late-January visit coincided with a spate of calls from clients who wanted to know if Six Rivers Planned Parenthood was still open. After all, they had heard on the news that Bush's first act as president was to reinstate the Mexico City Policy or "global gag rule," which Bill Clinton had reversed as his first order of business eight years earlier. "Clients didn't understand what this policy meant for them," the clinic director told us. Nor did they understand what the Bush presidency meant for them: "Many of the callers didn't even know that Bush was pro-life until after he got into office."

The next day, Amy and I visited a high school in Petaluma, California. The kids—most of whom were working class and middle class—were very interested in the concept of the male pill, wondering when it would be available (not for a while). They were also extremely concerned that abortion had just been "overturned." We explained that abortion was still legal, although with several pernicious barriers. We then tried to make sense of the global gag rule: "Um, it means that health organizations in poor countries won't get any aid money from us unless they promise not to provide or counsel abortions as a family planning option." The teenagers looked confused. So did we.

WELCOME TO the world of passive-aggressive, antichoice activism. Welcome to trickle-down women's rights. Welcome to W.'s America, where no social ill is too sick to be kissed by a platitude from the president and sent on its way. Amy Richards, who is one of the founders of the Third Wave Foundation (a national organization for feminist activists between the ages of sixteen and thirty), sums up W. this way: "Bush has too much faith in individuals over leadership. His campaign mantra was basically 'I trust Americans—they're tolerant.' But tolerance is exactly the problem. We tolerate the mistreatment of women and gay people in the military, we tolerate not having Head Start, we tolerate unequal pay."

Certainly W.'s opaque-but-friendly approach in the campaign foreshadows what we can expect from the man. Remember the debate in which Al Gore called him on his health care record in Texas that seemed to negate his "leave no child behind" slogan? Faced with his shameful record of leaving thousands of eligible children out of government-subsidized health care, Bush did what he does best: he changed channels, accusing Gore of challenging W.'s good heart. But it's not his heart we have to worry about, it's his politics, politics that so far has W. standing for "white" and "well-heeled," but not, as the GOP contended during the campaign, for women.

What is so antiwoman about Bush and his leadership is hard to specify. W. doesn't dislike women, clearly, but he doesn't see them as full human beings outside of their traditional role. In his world, women are helpmates or mothers or daughters. With that comes a fond disrespect that—like his global gag rule and its ensuing confusion for women who want clinic services—is subtly paralyzing. And doggone it if his wife, Laura, isn't openly pro-choice. No matter, no one is worried that she'll be making policy, just as W.'s pro-choice mother (who was once on the board of Planned Parenthood), Barbara, never got in the way of George Sr.'s antichoice agenda. Presidents' wives do make a difference in how women are treated during an administration. Along with respect, being First Lady comes with assumptions about staying in your place. Hillary Clinton broke that mold, love her or loathe her. In fact, she wasn't really the First Lady in our minds—she was Hillary, which is why she could make the transition to Senator Clinton. Laura Bush's remarks have shied away from this type of ambition. A former teacher obsessed with reading and possessed of a verbally challenged spouse, she will travel across America to promote sound teaching practices. She is already reassuring reporters that she is "not going to run for Senator of New York."

If only. Feminism is, of course, as much in favor of women having traditional professions as it is of their breaking into male-dominated ones. The point of women's liberation is to have the choice to be whoever you are. Still, it must be said that in Washington, D.C., and in the world of politics generally, women are outsiders. President Clinton, rural poor kid and son of a single mom, was also a scrappy outsider (for a straight white guy). Even though he was disappointing to progressives and sexually fo-

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cused on women in a way that pulled attention from his leadership, Bill Clinton has something many leaders do not. He more than likes women, he empathizes with them. By contrast, W. was raised on the inside, a vantage point that has given him little opportunity to empathize. In fact, W.'s way with women hearkens back to a time before feminism, the days when women weren't at the table. His Eisenhower-era, old-boys-club approach is tempered by his having spent the last thirty years living in an America that has been dealing with women's rights. This mix of traditional privilege and feminist-influenced culture means that he knows enough to have women in his cabinet, but not enough to represent women's interests in his administration.

NOWHERE IS this more obvious than in his handling of abortion and other issues of sexual choice for women. W. has selected John Ashcroft as attorney general, a man who described abortion as "an atrocity against the future" and who has a twenty-year antichoice track record, including support for laws to criminalize abortion and to define life as beginning at fertilization (which precludes many forms of birth control). W.'s head of Health and Human Services, Tommy Thompson, announced that he will take the approval of RU-486 under consideration again, despite the fact that this abortifacient has been in use in Europe for nearly a decade without mishap. Pro-life organizations are lobbying heavily to ban so-called "partial birth" abortions again. If Congress approves any pro-life attack on women's access to safe and comprehensive reproductive health services, Bush is likely to sign it into law (in sharp contrast, again, to Clinton).

On February 27, 2001, George W. Bush, who lost the popular vote by half a million ballots, addressed Congress. The applause for his simple statements was frequent and deafening. In fact, the enthusiasm was so disproportionate to the content that the applause had to be the sound of hundreds of hefty, white, male Republicans patting themselves on the back. "I thank you for making a new President feel welcome," said Bush to nonstop applause. The broader his platitudes, the more insistent the standing ovation. Then came his plan: "Tax relief," not pay equity or raising the minimum wage, both of which affect women's incomes disproportionately. There was no mention of the fact that women pay fewer taxes—because they make less money—and are therefore less likely to benefit from even the $200 per year estimated increased refund. "Education" comes with "triple-funding for reading" and "character education." I think it's fair to say that character education isn't going to include the feminist views on choice, birth control, sexuality education, and the like, nor will it preach male accountability when it comes to STDs or pregnancy.

W.'S VISION for women? Well, the camera winked briefly at Condoleezza Rice, Bush's national security adviser, but we've already heard that she's about as powerful as a Mac Plus, and that it is Vice President Dick Cheney (who sat behind the president, fittingly, to his right) who calls the shots. W. listed many issues that affect women more than men, but, with the minor exception of the prescription drug benefit and its sibling Medicare (and his sentence about elderly women needing this benefit the most), he never actually mentioned "women." Here's one salient example: W. claims to want an army of mentors for kids with a parent in prison. He doesn't say that the vast majority of parents in prison who actually have custody and care for their children are mothers. The number of women in prison has increased at least threefold in the last half-decade, as a result of stiff mandatory sentences for possession of even small amounts of drugs. These same women, many of whom have children, could be caring for their own families if they weren't locked up so precipitously and if more help were available within the community. Rather than mentors for kids after their parents are incarcerated, how about mothers' helpers for poor women, after-school programs for poor children, and a legitimate welfare-to-work plan? Nah, that would be addressing women's needs. The closest Bush will come to that is to claim support for children who are "innocently" dependent on the system.

After thirty years of feminism, how did we end up with W.? "He tried to telegraph his concern for education and suburban values to


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women," says *Nation* columnist and feminist Katha Pollitt, who noted that basically it worked with white women during the election—49 percent of whom voted for him. "I think the drug benefit is sort of aimed at women, and the supposed concern of women for domestic 'caring and sharing' type issues." Simultaneously, however, "he was telegraphing to the Christian Right how anti-abortion he was while soft-pedaling it to the rest of us," says Pollitt. Which is why callers to Six Rivers Planned Parenthood wondered whether the clinic was still open at the same time that they expressed shock at W.'s pro-life stance.

"There is something about him that is very manly in an exclusive way," says a friend who, despite working for the pharmaceutical industry, finds Bush terrifying. "He is like the glass ceiling." It's an apt metaphor: W.'s America keeps barriers for women invisible but impenetrable. Why doesn't W. stand for women? Because there is nothing in his life that would ask him to stand up for women, including (so far) women themselves. The real reason that W. doesn't stand for women is because, let's face it, he doesn't have to. And women—we who use clinics, or raise kids without health care, or are in prison, or care about people who are—are the only ones who can change that sexist reality. ●

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# The Politically Talented Mr. Greenspan

**Jeff Faux**

A FEW SHORT days after Bill Clinton vacated the White House this January, Federal Reserve Board head Alan Greenspan publicly endorsed the new tenant's $1.6 trillion tax cut. Democrats who had been convinced by both Clinton and Greenspan to give paying off the debt priority over education, health, and other social investments were "shocked" and "stunned" to hear the chairman brush aside concerns that the government would have to borrow money in order to finance George W's largesse, 40 percent of which would go to the richest 1 percent of Americans. The *New York Times* announced that we had entered the "Greenspan-Bush" era, following the "Greenspan-Clinton" era, in which the president of the United States came to be the junior partner in the management of the U.S. economy.

The story of the Greenspan-Clinton relationship has been embellished into a charming tale of an "odd-couple" policy-wonk romance in which the brilliant, shy economist teaches the economic facts of life to the brilliant, party-going president. The typecasting doesn't quite fit reality. Not only is Greenspan a well-known Georgetown partygoer, his reputation as a scholarly economist is not as heavy among his peers as the business press would have us believe. In his recent generally worshipful biography of Greenspan, Bob Woodward reports that "the Chairman's language was highly idiosyncratic, often not fully grounded in the data."* At the meetings of the Federal Open Market Committee, the Ph.D.s in the room "would be nearly rolling their eyes as the chairman voiced his view about how the economy might be changing."

A closer look at the Greenspan-Clinton era suggests that the chair's genius stems more from his political talents than his economic

**Maestro: Greenspan's Fed and the American Dream* (Simon and Schuster, 2000)

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insights. Thus, on the basis of dubious economics and weak history, he convinced Bill Clinton to give top priority to the elimination of the deficit, as opposed to the public investments in education, health, and infrastructure that Clinton had promised the Democratic faithful in his campaign. In effect, Clinton spent much of his presidency shortchanging the Democratic Party's constituency so he could pay down the debts run up by his two Republican predecessors. As a result, George Bush II is the lucky recipient of a massive fiscal surplus, which he fully intends to use for military spending and tax cuts to promote the interests of the Republicans' higher-income clientele.

As Woodward reports, Greenspan argued that federal deficits would ignite inflation, frightening Democrats with the memory of the late 1970s, when double-digit increases in consumer prices enabled Ronald Reagan to drive Jimmy Carter out of the White House. What Woodward doesn't tell us is that Greenspan's dire warnings were not supported by economic evidence. Other than in wartime, there is no clear relationship between federal deficit spending and inflation. Moreover, the economic scenario of an overheated peacetime economy triggering a politically unacceptable wage-price spiral has never happened in modern times. Every major episode of inflation that cut short growth over the last century has been triggered either by war or increases in global oil prices. The last price flare-up was generated by a short-lived panic in oil markets when the 1990 Gulf War was launched. It was also the shock of suddenly rising global oil prices—not runaway economic growth—that sparked the inflation of the 1970s. The previous price run-up was kicked off by Lyndon Johnson's refusal to raise taxes to pay for the Vietnam War. The inflation spell before that was ignited by the Korean War, the one before that by the lifting of price controls after World War II, and the one before that, by the impact of World War I.

Greenspan is unlikely to be ignorant of this history. Therefore, an explanation for Greenspan's behavior that better fits the facts is that his underlying motive was to restrain federal domestic spending, rather than contain impending inflation. Greenspan is, after all, an ideological conservative, an early acolyte of the social Darwinist novelist Ayn Rand and Ronald Reagan's choice for Fed chair. Greenspan was also from Wall Street and has been trained to view the stock market as the fundamental measure of the country's economic health.

Conventional wisdom holds that Clinton had no choice but to accept Greenspan's view of the world. Had he not, the Fed would have raised rates in mid-1996 when the unemployment rate dipped below the 5.5 percent to 6 percent area that Greenspan had previously claimed to be the inflationary trigger. Higher rates would have killed the Clinton expansion just before the reelection campaign, repeating the mistake Greenspan made when his monetary policy forced a recession on George Bush I just before the campaign of 1992. You don't make that mistake twice in a row if you want to be reappointed as chair of the Fed, which Greenspan was in 1996.

So Greenspan was bluffing. Clinton understood what all this budget cutting was doing to the Democratic agenda and complained to his staff that they had become "Eisenhower Republicans." But each time he wavered, his treasury secretary, Bob Rubin, former chair of Goldman Sachs, reminded him of the risks of a Wall Street reaction if Greenspan was right. In the end, Greenspan won all the political chips. The Clinton years saw a decline in social investment as a share of the nation's income, and by the end of the 1990s, his administration became a champion of eliminating the entire national debt—a position that would have been hooted out of the Democratic Caucus a few short years before. During his presidential campaign, Al Gore told the *Wall Street Journal* that if a recession came, instead of pumping up government spending he would cut it, "Just as a corporation has to cut expenses when revenues fall off, and that sometimes turns out for the long-term benefit of the company." This put the Democratic standard-bearer somewhat to the right of Herbert Hoover.

That Greenspan was more interested in cutting federal spending than he was worried about inflation explains what seems to many a mystery in his shifting attitude toward the stock


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market boom of the late 1990s. After publicly suggesting in 1996 that "irrational exuberance" had made the market dangerously overvalued, Greenspan then shut up and proceeded to accommodate a speculative frenzy that drove up share prices of companies with no profits and little prospects to outrageous heights. Between June 1996 and June 2000, the Dow rose 93 percent and the NASDAQ 125 percent, and the overall ratio of stock prices to corporate earnings reached record highs. Greenspan stood by as stock market hucksters—in the guise of objective analysts—hyped worthless paper in fly-by-night boiler rooms, on national television, and in thousands of newsletters to gullible customers, who were able to leverage their gambling with easy credit supplied by the Federal Reserve.

Greenspan's story is that his mind was changed about the market's overvaluation when he became convinced that the new economy was generating higher rates of productivity, which he said explained the absence of inflation. Increased productivity would not only keep prices from rising, it would in time power future profits high enough to justify the booming share prices. But the higher rates of productivity only began to appear in 1996, which was much too early in the process for anyone, much less the chair of the Federal Reserve, to believe that the economy had arrived at a new plateau of permanently higher efficiency.

Moreover, in 1999, Greenspan initiated a series of interest rate hikes, when inflation was even slower than it was in 1996 and productivity was growing even faster. In addition to his rote reference to the specter of inflation, Greenspan indicated that he had finally decided to do something about the overpriced stock market. But why was it necessary to slow down the entire economy because speculators had driven up the price of corporate shares? A much better and safer way would have been to use his authority to restrict credit to the stock market by requiring higher "margins," that is, down payments on the purchase of stock. By 1999, margin debt in the stock market had reached the heights it held just prior to the market meltdown in 1987.

A number of market observers, including financier George Soros and Stanley Fischer, deputy director at the International Monetary Fund, advocated that the Fed let the air out of this credit boom by raising margin requirements. But Greenspan refused this more sensible strategy. At his confirmation hearing before the U.S. Senate Banking Committee in 1996, he said that he did not want to discriminate against individuals who were not wealthy and therefore needed to borrow in order to play the stock market. Given that people who use margin leverage to buy stock are typically wealthy by any reasonable standard, this is a weak rationale for favoring higher interest rate policies that would cause unemployment and personal bankruptcies among lower- and middle-income working people.

His refusal to raise margin requirements suggests that Greenspan's goal was not to lower share prices. *Rather, it was to raise profits to levels that would justify the high stock prices.* Obviously, a stock's price-earnings ratio can be lowered by changing either side of the ratio—by reducing prices or raising earnings. Given that the economy was already at high levels of productivity and close to full capacity, there was little room to raise profits through more economic growth. But a dose of unemployment might help squeeze labor costs. Thus, Greenspan's raising of the interest rates can be seen not so much as a "pre-emptive" strike against a phantom inflation, but a rather desperate effort to avoid a market decline by raising the earnings of investors through lowering the earnings of workers.

It is widely known that the government's labor cost index, rather than its consumer price index, is the Greenspan Fed's favored indicator of inflation potential. Moreover, Greenspan himself observed publicly on a number of occasions that the anxiety of American workers over losing their jobs was a critical factor in keeping wages down during most of the 1990s. By 1999, tight labor markets (plus an increase in the minimum wage) were beginning to raise wages. Slowing down the economy was a way of weakening workers' resolve to demand more pay.

Today, it looks like Greenspan's gamble failed. The stock market began to tumble in the first half of 2000, not because labor costs

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were rising, but because limits of investor credulity were finally reached. The business press, which a year before was proclaiming the thirty-year-old dot-com executives as pioneers of the new economy, was now ridiculing the public for having believed that the stock of companies that would never make a profit could go up forever. The new economy, as one *Wall Street Journal* writer put it, "now looks like an old-fashioned credit bubble." In the second half of that year, consumers whose debt-to-income ratios were at record highs, began to pull in. Christmas sales flopped, and by early January Greenspan reversed himself and lowered interest rates.

About that same time, just after the Supreme Court appointed him president, George W. Bush began forecasting a "Clinton" recession. But the blame for a downturn will be hard to pin on the absent Clinton. So George W. better watch out. Having cost Bush's father the presidency and Bill Clinton his political soul, Alan Greenspan is at the top of his game. If the next year gives birth to a growing economy, it will be named after him. If it's a recession, it will be named for his junior partner in the White House. ●

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# What Next for Labor Rights?

**David Brody**

WHAT ARE THE prospects for labor rights in the next four years? The question would seem to require some estimate, first, of what the Republicans intend and, second, of their capacity to do it. But current labor law is not amenable to these straightforward calculations. Congress has not significantly amended the law in more than forty years, and regarding basic doctrine—the rights of workers to organize, choose their own representatives, and bargain collectively—the Taft-Hartley amendments (1947) to the original National Labor Relations Act (1935) are the last word. The upshot is that labor law in practice is something like a constitution, in which the law is what the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and, ultimately, the Supreme Court say it is. Changes of administration have mattered, certainly, but their impact is indirect, mediated through NLRB appointments and a real but variable influence on how the law is applied. A second complication, arising from the first, is that sixty years of case law have turned labor law into a monster. There are some in the labor movement who have given up on it. If labor's best hope is to extricate itself from the law, then how we judge the impact of a hostile Bush administration becomes problematic. No *Dissent* reader is going to root for the employer side in the next big representation case. But if it helps wean the unions from a stultifying law, is adversity such a bad thing? Or, conversely, are we supposed to cheer for the good intentions of the Clinton administration?

Consider the record. Bill Clinton had a better than average opportunity to reshape the NLRB because of the number of pending openings in 1993. The new chair, William B. Gould, was a notable choice. A Stanford law professor of feisty independence and no interest in playing the inside-the-beltway game, he had just published a book, *Agenda for Reform*, arguing for a strengthened labor law. In 1995, sensing an opportunity being wasted, reformers in the leadership of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) toppled Lane Kirkland's regime. John Sweeney came to power vowing to reinvigorate the labor movement and turn


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around its lagging organizing efforts. And at that point, the economy shifted into high gear; the labor market became the tightest in memory. If ever there was a moment for union resurgence, this was it. In fact, membership did grow modestly, although not enough to arrest the movement's shrinking density (16 percent in 1993, 14.9 percent in 1995, 13.9 in 1999). Last year, membership actually fell by 219,000. Union density now stands at 13.5 percent, but in the private sector—the NLRB's bailiwick—the figure is 9 percent, the lowest it's been since the modern movement got on its feet a century ago.

To understand these numbers, we have to look at the underlying dynamics. Some half-a-million union jobs disappear every year, mostly as a function of market forces, which in our globalized, high-tech economy hit the older, unionized sectors hardest. The unions have to organize a like number of new workers, plus another 200,000 (to offset the annual labor force growth), just to stay even. Last year, the private-sector unions, far from keeping up, organized only about 400,000 members and suffered a net loss of 271,000 (partly offset by gains in the public sector). Explaining why new jobs aren't unionized is much harder than explaining why old ones disappear, but we don't need a definitive answer—none is forthcoming from academics—to be confident that something is terribly awry in labor law.

Take the law at its own word. Follow my procedures, it says to American workers, and you can move from individual to collective bargaining. If in a representation election run by the NLRB, a majority of your fellow workers votes for a union, it will be certified as bargaining agent for your entire unit, and your employer will be required to sit down and bargain in good faith. This is the state-mandated route to collective bargaining. What would constitute a fair test of it? In my book, the test is productivity—not how many elections unions win, but how many workers enjoy the opportunity offered by the law to choose. By the late 1980s, little more than two hundred thousand per year did so, this in a labor force of seventy million eligible but unrepresented workers. The participation rate was down to a *seventh* of what it had been in the early 1950s. Conservative academics say that all this means is that the "market demand" for union representation has slackened. But there has been no slackening in the public sector, where union representation currently stands at 42 percent and is rising. Why should we think "demand" would be so much weaker in the private sector if workers there had the same freedom of choice as public employees have? So, has the Clinton NLRB made any difference? As far as productivity is concerned, no. The number of NLRB elections has actually fallen by about five hundred annually from what it had been under Ronald Reagan.

One might argue that the Clinton board wasn't given a fair chance. Senate Republicans read Gould's book and came after him. It took ten months to get him confirmed. And then, scarcely had Gould and his colleagues settled in than the Republicans seized control of Congress. The NLRB became a favorite (if not much reported) target of the Gingrich crew, whose particular whip hand was appropriations. One of Gould's major initiatives—rulemaking that would eliminate the endless litigation over appropriate bargaining units for multiple sites—was squelched by an appropriations bill rider sponsored by congressional Republicans. Their normal routine, however, was to intercede in individual cases at the behest of employers—and never mind that the board was supposed to be independent. In his unbuttoned memoir about his NLRB odyssey, *Labored Relations*, Gould says that board members and general counsel in fact were intimidated, and that progress he had anticipated, for example, on defining independent contractors (such as truckers) as employees was stopped short by Republican pressure. Gould thought it his duty to educate the public about the issues before the board. All he managed to do was provoke the wrath of the Republicans. He had been naïve, Gould conceded.

BUT IT WOULD be equally naïve to believe that he could have done any better by keeping his head down. Every NLRB case of any consequence is appealed to the bitter end. Irate employers would have been knocking on Congress's door no matter how quiet Gould was. But, far more important, they

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mostly had the case law on their side anyway. Consider employer conduct during the representation election. In *Agenda for Reform*, Gould proposed that the charade over coercive speech be abandoned—employers would be free to say whatever they wanted—while giving greater access by organizers to employees on company property. But in *Lechmere* (1992) the Supreme Court (Clarence Thomas writing for the majority) had just slammed the door on access; organizers had no right, save where workers were isolated and otherwise unreachable, to trespass on company property, even when that property was a mall used by the general public. Gould perforce submitted. Despite his grumbling, he declined to join a case mounted by the AFL-CIO to reopen *Lechmere* on the ground that this might impugn his neutrality.

Elsewhere, he was a bit gutsier. On striker replacements, for example, a chink opened when the Supreme Court ruled in 1983 that if a strike settlement reinstated strikers, replacement workers promised permanent employment could sue for breach of contract. On that basis, the Gould board said (*O. E. Butterfield* 1995) that, without an explicit promise to replacement workers, the presumption was that strikers had not been permanently replaced. Not much, but something. More important was the board's greater inclination than its predecessors to find that strikes involved unfair labor practices, which negated the employer's right to replace strikers permanently. A modest pro-labor drift on factual findings no doubt can be found across the range of cases coming before the Gould board. But on doctrinal matters, what Gould advocated in *Agenda for Reform* was essentially foreclosed.

He did have some scope on procedure. Like everyone else in the business, Gould knew that timeliness is everything in organizing struggles. He resurrected the discretionary 10(j) injunction, by which the NLRB can provide a quick remedy in egregious unfair labor practices cases. He favored postal ballots where employees were scattered or on strike. And in a variety of ways, he proposed speeding up the handling of cases where they originate before the administrative law judges. Despite Republican pressure, most of these initiatives (but, as noted, not rule-making for multiple-site units) survived and did some good. But the NLRB itself, by Gould's acid account, was impervious to procedural reform. The number of pending cases climbed steadily during his tenure and by the time he departed, in 1998, was twice as high as before his arrival. Gould is scathing about the timidity and indecisiveness of his colleagues—the Democrats especially. In truth, he concedes that the problem is endemic, a "dilatory virus" that infects the entire federal bureaucracy, but is at its worst where decisions are apt to be controversial. By 1999, nearly a hundred cases had been pending for more than two years, and 10(j) injunctions were again falling into disuse.

LACKLUSTER as the board's record was under Clinton, it is bound to be worse under Bush. How much worse, however, is an open question. By convention, two board members and the chair come from the administration's party, the other two from the minority party. Two Democrats and one Republican carry over, and Bush (as of this writing) has not yet announced his appointments. He may not want to expend much political capital here, assuming he even cares very much, and if the Democrats recapture the House in 2002, that would certainly have a moderating effect. Not that it much matters. The case law has become so unbalanced that management will be satisfied if the Bush board just holds to a steady course. But employers have every reason to expect that its bent in enforcing the law will be more pro-management. Unions will have a harder time before the Bush board.

The big question, however, is about the possibility of statutory change. The law has been resistant to amendment—in part because the broad terms in which it is written invite judicial interpretation, but also because every attempt at amendment since 1959 has evoked fierce opposition and ended in stalemate. Such was the fate of the Clinton administration's early foray into labor law reform under the auspices of the Dunlop Commission. What had prompted this initiative was then secretary of labor Robert Reich's enthusiasm for the "high performance" workplace that made, in his view, for global competitiveness. Labor law came into it because of a provision (Section 8a2) pro-


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hibiting company-dominated labor organizations the shop structures that the high-performance workplace presumably required. House Republicans piggy-backed on the failed Dunlop Commission deliberations to launch a proposal of their own, the Teamwork for Employees and Management (TEAM) Act, exempting employers who want to establish shop committees from Section 8a2, providing only that these committees not embrace collective bargaining or interfere with existing agreements. A broad coalition of corporations and management groups has formed to plug the TEAM Act.

What are they up to? For the teamwork objectives they claim, 8a2 is not that big of a problem. It exempts workplace organizations that don't deal with the terms and conditions of employment, and even where they do, the NLRB, in practice, doesn't interfere without evidence of anti-union intent. (The 1992 case that triggered the furor over 8a2—*Electromation* [1992]—involved committees set up in response to a union campaign.) My guess—historically informed, I hope—is that management strategic thinkers somewhere have been watching the de-unionization of the American economy and have decided that this is an inherently unstable situation. They want to put in place preemptive workplace structures that employers can control, and they hope to succeed where their corporate predecessors of the 1930s (who had the same idea) so signally failed. No wonder the labor movement is implacably against the TEAM Act. It passed the House in 1995 and was stopped in 1996 only by Clinton's veto. No more vetoes are coming, but for the foreseeable future the Democrats remain strong enough to kill the TEAM Act in the Senate. Still, the likely battle can only be a source of anxiety in the AFL-CIO.

There is a very slim chance, however, of a different scenario. Shop committees have found a good deal of support in academic circles, both among those interested in cooperative work relations and among those who believe that workers deserve a voice even absent union representation. High up in the AFL-CIO, Kirkland's able secretary-treasurer, Tom Donahue, thought that any degree of organization was better than none, and that shop committees might be a springboard for future unionization (as they had been in some firms during the 1930s). All this, of course, assumed that any amended 8a2 would protect the autonomy of shop committees. The TEAM Act offers no such protections; employers can do whatever they want, even appoint the committee members. One can imagine an amended TEAM Act with the protections added or an alternative, such as Harvard professor Paul Weiler's scheme of a few years ago for state-mandated works councils. But I doubt it. The labor movement is viscerally against anything that smacks of company unionism—this may have been a factor in Donahue's defeat at Sweeney's hands in 1995. And any arrangement that might satisfy the unions would certainly alienate corporate America, which has too good a thing going to fool around. Nor is there is any compelling state interest in this issue; the politicians will be listening to their constituencies.

So what should the labor movement be doing in the coming years? Everybody says, organize more. Yes, but as much as possible, in campaigns not directed at NLRB elections. The obstacles are too great—too much intimidation, too dominant an employer influence, too much delay. Through the 1990s, NLRB elections never produced more than 104,000 new represented workers a year—the average was nearer 75,000—and no amount of effort is going to improve that record very much. The labor movement cannot afford to expend its resources on a process that produces so small a fraction of what it needs just to stay even. Union people will have to be vigilant against the two historic lures of the NLRB election. The first is that, more than any other process, it offers the most certain and most coveted result: certification as bargaining agent (although this is now much tarnished by the high failure rate in achieving first contracts). The second is that the public nature of the process lends it a special standing, as if the NLRB alone is the legitimate route to collective bargaining. The rights of workers under the law are actually far more expansive. They have a protected right to organize in any form that suits them, and employers are at liberty to negotiate under any arrangement mutually satis-



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factory to both parties, up to and including exclusive recognition (providing only that the employer is not colluding with a union that does not in fact have a majority).

Thinking about the labor law should be informed by what is happening out in the field. The AFL-CIO should forget about reforming the representation election. Never mind that the environment in Washington today is so unpromising. The representation election has been transformed so from its original form—and so cleverly wrapped in unassailable principles (of free speech, property rights, individual choice)—that debating it would be an uphill battle even if labor had the votes. Besides, there are still circumstances in which an NLRB election is a good option.

The labor movement should look elsewhere in the labor law, most particularly, at the right to organize. For starters, making workers feel secure is the most important single condition for the kind of grassroots organizing unions are currently doing. Moreover, the right to organize is about freedom of association, and no employers, not even the most rabidly anti-union, ever say that it's okay to fire workers for joining a union. They do it anyway because the punishment is so weak—just back pay minus what the victim earned (or might have earned) in the interim plus reinstatement (rarely meaningful if the union has been broken). What is needed is the elevation of the right to organize to the fundamental status that it deserves, with strong remedies like those that apply for racial discrimination or sexual harassment. It should not be treated as just another unfair labor practice. This is an issue on which the labor movement can win, even in George W.'s era, if only it can be gotten on the table.

The AFL-CIO is talking about refocusing its efforts on the states. Good idea. When it comes to unions, we're really two nations. In many of the states that voted for Al Gore, union strength hovers around 20 percent, a lot of clout. California, to take a shining example, has just passed a law (A.B. 1889) prohibiting employers with state contracts from using state funds in anti-union campaigns. A more daring approach might be to press for a general right-to-organize law, ideally through a state proposition. If organized labor could defeat the "paycheck protection" initiative a couple of years ago, why shouldn't it be able to pass a right-to-organize initiative today? The argument would go something like this: the state regards freedom of association as a fundamental right; it has an obligation to secure that right for its citizens; and this requires remedies adequate to deter anti-union employers. No doubt the proposition would run afoul of the preemption defenses ringing national labor law, but the Supreme Court might be hard put to answer this particular line of argument. In any case, we would count the venture a success if it got the country talking about the right to organize.

Whatever the labor movement chooses to do, the one thing it cannot do is nothing. With private-sector membership down to 9 percent, it does not have the luxury of waiting out the Bush administration. ●

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# Corporate Democracy; Civic Disrespect

**James K. Galbraith**

With the events of late in the year 2000, the United States left behind the era of constitutional republicanism and turned to a different form of government. It is not, however, a new form. It is, rather, a transplant, highly familiar from a different arena of advanced capitalism.

This is corporate democracy. It is a system whereby a board of directors—read Supreme Court—selects the chief executive officer. The CEO in turn appoints new members of the board. The shareholders, owners in title only, are invited to cast their votes in periodic referenda. But their franchise is only symbolic, for management holds a majority of the proxies. On no important issue do the CEO and the board permit themselves to lose.

The Supreme Court clarified this in a way that the Florida courts could not have. The media have accepted it, for it is the form of government to which they are already professionally accustomed. And the shameless attitude of the Bush high command merely illustrates, in unusually visible fashion, the prevalent ethical system of corporate life.

But the post-election crisis was only the capstone of the story. The manipulation of this election extended far back in time, and it is worth reviewing briefly some of its many dimensions.

One strand began with the assault on Bill Clinton, the elevation of his personal flaws to an affair of state, his impeachment, and so the neutralization of Clinton as a political force. This was deliberate, cold-blooded, purposeful. Rightly or wrongly as a political matter, Al Gore accepted it. It certainly affected him in Arkansas, one state where Clinton's active help might have decided the election.

The second strand was the invention of George W. Bush. A professional front man, Bush's major credential lies in his willingness to recite, again and again, precisely those lines placed in front of him and no others. Bush was surrounded from the beginning by adept handlers, and by seasoned elders to whom he defers. He had a brand name, one hundred unanswerable millions of dollars to spend, and no liabilities that could not be kept mostly hidden through one election.

The third strand lay in the rearrangement of the political scenery after 1996. Ross Perot's rebellion was the key to Clinton's election in 1992, and the Reform Party greatly boosted his margin of reelection. In 2000, with $12.4 million of federal monies to spend, Reform dissolved and disappeared. Pat Buchanan killed it; meanwhile, Perot endorsed Bush. Three-quarters of the Reform vote went back to the Republicans. Was this an accident of fate?

The fourth element was Ralph Nader. Nader's disaffection with the Democrats—on issues from consumer protection, to the media, to the drug war, to the death penalty—was genuine. His judgment, particularly late in the campaign when he went to the swing states, was plainly disastrous. And Nader's view that there was no significant difference between Gore and Bush was quickly proved false by Bush's cabinet appointments.

A fifth element, I believe, was the disruption of the economy effected by a coalition of Reagan holdovers, bankers, and their associates on the Federal Reserve Board from 1999 through May 2000. Rising interest rates in this period served no anti-inflation function: there was no inflation to fight. But they first stoked and then destroyed the technology boom, and by fall, they were causing a serious economic slowdown. Only (and immediately) after the election did the Fed begin to move to bring interest rates back down. Was this coinciden-

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tal? No overt evidence suggests otherwise, but political motivations are not unheard-of at the Federal Reserve, and history will judge.

These elements of manipulation—personal destruction, fronts, third parties, and interest-rate manipulations, not to mention the normal mendacity on the issues—are all well within the modern American political tradition, as practiced by both parties. (It was Clinton, after all, who elevated the modern arts of fund-raising and issue triangulation among the Democrats, a theft of intellectual property that the Republicans never forgave.) But the theft of Florida, ultimately delivered by the Supreme Court, represented a step beyond. And so it was the theft of Florida that will mark this election in history.

The theft of Florida was something the Republicans did alone. Gore drew lines: at any attack on the legitimacy of the Electoral College, at the attack on military ballots, at direct participation in the Seminole and Martin County lawsuits, at the demands for relief over the butterfly ballots in Palm Beach. These were, perhaps, sensible legal lines. But they also comported with a larger principle—that votes should be counted and the system treated with respect. Bush drew no lines of principle. For him, there was only one objective: to win.

When Bush did win, by a single Supreme Court vote, Gore's concession speech was justly praised for grace and humor. It paid due deference to the triumph of corporate political ethics, but did not embrace them. It thus preserved Gore for another political day. But Gore also sent an unmistakable message to American Democrats: do not forget.

ALMOST IMMEDIATELY, of course, forgetting became the media order of the day. So far as the press was concerned, it became almost un-American not to accept the diktat of the Supreme Court. Or to be precise, the distinction drawn by Gore himself became holy writ: one might disagree with the Court, but not with the legitimacy of its decision. Press references from that moment forward were to President-elect Bush, an unofficial title and something that the governor from Texas (president-select? president-designate?) manifestly was not.

The key to dealing with the Bush people, however, is precisely not to accept them. Like many Americans, I have nothing personal against Bush, Dick Cheney, Colin Powell—or, apart from John Ashcroft—the others who surfaced as members of the new administration. But I will not reconcile myself to them. They lost the election. Then they arranged to obstruct the count of the vote. They don't deserve to be there, and that changes everything. They have earned our civic disrespect, and that is what we, the people, should accord them.

In social terms, civic disrespect means that the illegitimacy of this administration must not be allowed to fade from view. The conventions of politics remain: Bush is president; Congress must work with him. But those of us outside that process are not bound by those conventions, and to the extent that we have a voice, we should use it.

In practical political terms, civic disrespect means drawing lines around the freedom of maneuver of the incoming administration. In many areas, including foreign policy, there will be few major changes; in others, such as annual budgets and appropriations, compromises will have to be reached. But Bush should be opposed, as a matter of principle, on actions with a reach that will extend beyond his actual term.

First, this president should not be permitted to make lifetime appointments unless by consensus and on purely nonpolitical lines. The fifty Senate Democrats should freely block judicial nominations whenever they carry even the slightest ideological taint. That may mean most of them, but no matter. For the Supreme Court especially, vacancies need not be filled. The Court can be rebuilt later, when properly elected government returns.

Second, the Democrats should advise Bush not to introduce any legislation on Social Security or Medicare. The people voted for the candidate who vowed not to tamper with those programs. Problems, if any, may be left for the next administration.

Third, Democrats should furiously oppose long-term tax measures, and particularly the elimination of the estate tax, which is a social incentive for recycling wealth to the nonprofit sector that has had a powerful effect on the


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form of American society. Democrats should be more willing to compromise with Bush on the rate structure of the income tax—something that can always be changed back—than on the estate tax, which, once repealed, will never be re-enacted.

Fourth, the people must unite to oppose the global dangers of national missile defense (NMD)—a strategic nightmare on which Bush campaigned that threatens for all time the security of us all. Donald Rumsfeld and the new Pentagon are radical disbelievers in treaties and the international rule of law, and it is treaty law, rather than incoming missiles, that are the true targets of NMD.

Fifth, Democrats should propose, and Congress should enact, a new voting rights act, targeted precisely at the Florida abuses. This should stipulate mandatory adoption of best-practice technology in all federal elections, a twenty-four-hour voting day, a ban on private contractors to aid in purging voter rolls, and mandatory, immediate hand counts of all under-votes in federal elections. (With optical scanners, the chad issues disappear.) It would be very useful to make such a bill a Democratic leadership priority and to press it as a complement to the McCain-Feingold emphasis on campaign finance reform.

With those steps taken, Democrats must also recognize and adapt to the new political landscape that emerged from this election. Outside of Florida, Democratic presidential candidates are finished in the South, but they have excellent prospects of consolidating a narrow majority of the electoral college—so long as, in the next election, there is no Nader defection.

What can prevent such a thing? Only a move away from the main Clinton compromises that so infuriated the progressive left. The Nader voters were motivated passionately by such issues as the drug war, the death penalty, consumer protection, and national missile defense—issues where New Democrats took Republican positions in their effort to woo the South. Clinton succeeded at this—but against Republicans who were only weakly "southern" at best.

Gore, on the other hand, was principally a northern candidate, as the results showed. Gore ran against, and defeated so far as ballots were concerned, a wholly southern Republican. Future Republicans will almost surely also be "southern," for that is where the base of the party now lies. And future Democrats, if they are northern candidates, too, can beat them.

The distinction is not one of regional origin, but of coalition. While Clinton ended his term with the loyal support of African-American voters, he started in 1992 by running away from that constituency, and even more so from labor. In contrast, Gore campaigned firmly with and for the Democratic base—which rewarded him with a high turnout and a huge proportion of support. It follows that a Gore administration would have had to give significant responsibilities to authentic representatives of labor and civil rights constituencies in a way that Clinton, with Ron Brown but not Lani Guinier, never did.

Gore's only weaknesses among northern constituencies lay with those alienated by his few southern positions, notably on the death penalty and drugs. These were left over from the Clinton consensus. But since the election clearly revealed that the South is unattainable, these positions have no remaining political value and can now be dropped. Once they are, and the Greens return to the Democratic Party, Oregon, Washington, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa should return firmly to the Democratic fold.

Many Democrats are at the moment bitter toward the Greens—understandably. But the fact remains that Nader cost Al Gore the election only in a very narrow sense. Al Gore won the election. Gore beat Bush in almost every state that Nader might have tipped: Oregon, Washington, Michigan, Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin. Only New Hampshire, where Gore lost by five thousand votes and Nader got twenty-two thousand, was tipped by Nader alone. The tragedy of New Hampshire, of course, was that those five thousand votes, and the four electors they delivered, would have made Florida irrelevant. But Gore won Florida, too.

In short, Gore's campaign proved that there is a majority in the United States for a government that is not, as Clinton's was, an assem-



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blage of lawyers, professors, and investment bankers nor as Bush's is, a mixture of politicians, soldiers, and corporate chieftains. Rather, Americans are willing to elect a government that firmly includes and effectively represents labor, minorities, and greens. This is the government we must seek to elect. If and when the United States returns to constitutional republicanism, something more than the normal restoration of the professional political class will be in order.

Thus the larger political task. Thug politics has to be defeated, bloc by bloc, beginning with the judiciary branch. The first step toward that goal lies in defining clearly the difference between their political ethics and our own. And for that, the essential first task is to assure that the information ministries of our new corporate republic do not successfully cast a fog of forgetting over the crime that we have just witnessed, with our own eyes. ●

JAMES K. GALBRAITH is the author of *Created Unequal: The Crisis in American Pay* and co-editor of *Inequality and Industrial Change: A Global View*. A shorter version of this essay appeared in the *Texas Observer* of January 19, 2001.

# Legends of the Fall

**Philip Green**

"WHEN THE LEGEND becomes fact," says Edmond O'Brien in John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, "print the legend." The process of printing the legend about the 2000 presidential election has now been well under way for some time; it might be useful to remind ourselves of some soon-to-be-forgotten facts.

In the February 8 issue of the *New York Review of Books*, which arrived in mailboxes just in time for the inauguration, there was a Basic Books ad for a book called *Smashmouth: Two Years in the Gutter with Al Gore and George W. Bush*, by Dana Milbank of the *Washington Post*, heralded as "The Definitive Look at All of Campaign 2000." The first paragraph of the ad's text, from one of commercial publishing's supposedly serious players, informed us that "Now that we've finally chosen our next leader, it's time to go back and figure out what happened." But of course this is exactly what did not happen, so that before we can even begin to "go back" we already have to endorse one of the first great lies of this century. For if one thing is absolutely clear, it's that "we" did not "choose" our next leader, he was chosen for us, by various people who were in no way part of the constituted democratic process for choosing him.

## Like a Conquered Province

The evidence is actually pretty clear about whom we did "choose." The popular vote was close, so close that in any case it verges on exaggeration to say that anyone chose anybody. But if we do believe in the absolute power of a 50 percent + n majority, then that majority (of the votes cast for either Bush or Gore) was certainly on the side of Al Gore, who won the election by approximately half a million votes.

On the other hand, perhaps the author of the ad meant that the Electoral College "chose" our next leader; that is, after all, the constitutionally mandated way of choosing a president. Only the Electoral College didn't "choose" Bush either. The electoral vote count is also quite clear: Gore won 267 electoral votes. Bush won 246 electoral votes. And in even the closest of the states for which those votes were tallied, the popular vote count withstood challenge and was accepted as accurate (or accurate enough) by everyone. *But nobody knows or ever will know who won the twenty-five electoral votes of Florida.* That is to say, as well as winning the popular vote, Al Gore was a clear winner of the elec-


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toral vote, so far as that vote is available to us. As to who actually "won" Florida's popular and thus electoral vote (the inverted commas should properly delight the heart of every postmodernist), we can say only that one potential vote count showed Bush to be the winner, but this count was incomplete, and was deliberately cut short by various Bush supporters who had the power—though not the legitimate authority—to do so. Conversely, several potential counts, in which "all" the countable votes cast would have been counted by one standard or another, show or might have shown Al Gore to be the winner (though a complete count of the undervotes might still have favored Bush).

The only truthful thing that can be said about the Florida vote, in the end, is that by the time we have taken into account not only undervotes (fittingly, my spell-check does not accept that word, nor does it recognize "chad"), but also the misleading ballot of Palm Beach County and the racial intimidation and denial of legal voters' voting rights by the GOP machine everywhere in the state (for a full analysis, see the *Nation* of February 5, 2001), there is no imaginable scenario by which George W. Bush clearly won. That the Florida Democratic Party itself bears much responsibility for both undervoting and overvoting among its constituents does not change this fact, since the issue is not blame but a truthful account of the results. The most appropriate resolution of the dilemma posed by this truth would have been (what is not constitutionally admissible) to have split its electoral votes—or counted them twice, twenty-five for each candidate, which might have been more constitutionally acceptable . Either way, "we" "chose" Al Gore to be president.

THERE ARE various possible left responses to the sequence of events that installed George W. Bush as the American president. One, the position of a small minority, is the vulgar Marxist position that it all doesn't matter: Bill Clinton was terrible for poor people, African-Americans, "the environment" (that useful abstraction), immigrants, the third world, and so on; Bush can't possibly be worse, and the ruling class still rules. If one allows one's anger at welfare "reform," the North American Free Trade Agreement, the destruction of habeas corpus, and the other miseries of Clinton-Goreism to overwhelm all other perspectives, this can seem—briefly—like an appealing critique. Unfortunately, its appeal depends on the presumption that people (other than the speaker, that is) are fools who don't know what's good for them and on a class reductionism about "who governs" that merits the qualifier "vulgar." As a single woman of my acquaintance put it quite simply (and angrily), "If you've ever been poor you know that anyone who thinks there's no difference between them is crazy."

More common is the approach that stalwarts of the left such as *Dissent*, the *Nation*, the Institute for Policy Studies, and others, are taking: inundating us with what promises to be three and a half years of position papers (one hopes not longer than that) on what is to be done, or fought for, or resisted; what counterproposals must be made, and so on, and so on. I must confess here to a probably idiosyncratic response to this prospect. For the moment, I can work up no interest in it, and cannot do so no matter how hard I try (admittedly this may change later). What attitude should the inhabitants of a conquered province have toward their conquerors? In Vichy France, for example, I doubt that the left cared in the slightest about Marshal Pétain's views on old-age pensions, labor unions, soil erosion in the Dordogne, the rights of Algerian immigrants, or any similar issues of "public policy" that might have existed at the time. Aside from the fact that he was generally right-wing and anti-Semitic, histories of the time do not record very much about the *maréchal*'s concrete views. He was a hedgehog, not a fox. He had only one idea, but it was a big one—that he should rule on behalf of Reaction.

George W. Bush, the "compassionate conservative" who has never to anyone's knowledge indulged in a single moment of actual compassion, is the same. His only idea is that he should govern on behalf of his social class; and to the victor go the spoils. On any other subject—education, race—he's about as sincere and persuasive as a wet dishrag, but on that one his behavior and his bearing speak volumes. Thus to say, for example, as the pun-



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dits (an arcane synonym for "purveyors of disinformation") were so relentlessly and cheerfully saying throughout the post-Election Day period, that there were "no tanks in the streets," is again to print the legend not the fact. The tank is just technology, a symbol of armed force—and armed force, from the state and local police, to the GOP's thugs, to the governor and state legislature who are the authoritative repository of all such force within a state—is exactly what decided the outcome. It didn't take much, and thus was not very noticeable, because aside from the protest demonstrations of African-Americans during the post-election days in Florida, the opposition, such as it was, lacked any will to resist or defy it.

Perhaps, as a professional democratic theorist (already probably a contradiction in terms), I take all of this too seriously. The United States survived the deal that ended Reconstruction in 1876 (but ex-slaves didn't really survive it), and with dead people voting early and often, vote totals have been corrupted before (though not such as to actually decide the outcome of a national election, even in 1960). But context is everything: 2000 is not 1876 or 1960, and when the president-installed's brother and his faithful servant orchestrate their own campaign of racial exclusion to help decide an election, and a major party suborns the highest court in the land, that is substantially different. (That should be put differently, perhaps; the Court suborned itself.) In any event, when they have seized the government (and the military force that is its real base), without qualm and accompanied by a ceaseless litany of publicly expressed hatred and contempt during the seizure process (think of James Baker), I find it hard to believe that they will care what I or any others think about paying for prescription drugs or the number of African-Americans in the federal judiciary. I also find it hard to believe that a party that supinely allowed the election to be taken from it by snarling force will stand up to its usurpers. As to who "they" are, if anyone who reads this might be wondering, the answer to that question was given once again by Edmond O'Brien, though in a different movie (*The Wild Bunch*): "They is *they*!" Anyone who doesn't know wasn't paying attention.

### "It's Sex, Stupid"

The lust for power needs no explanation. What is somewhat more difficult to explain is the hatred that accompanied that lust throughout the 1990s, reaching its apogee during the impeachment process and again during that surrogate for impeachment, the appropriation of the election. Even going back to the FDR-hating days, there has not been anything like it in my lifetime. As a veteran of the Vietnam antiwar movement and an avid follower of the post-Watergate impeachment, I find it especially hard to understand. "We" (or many of us) in some sense "hated" L.B.J. and Richard Nixon, or at least we thought we did. But many of us were embarrassed, or worse, by Weatherman rhetoric or the (mostly) youthful chants of "Hey, hey, L. B. J., how many kids did you kill today?" Our feeling was mostly one of excitement and passion, in the face of an actual conflict in which millions of real people were being slaughtered, fueled by an inflated sense of our own historical importance ("The Times They Are A-Changin," subject of many a political science final exam in those days). As for Richard Nixon, we really did believe there was a constitutional crisis, and in fact there really was one, involving the subornation of the Justice Department—and thus the separation of powers—and the use of antidemocratic tactics to secure an election and punish dissidents. And if we despised Nixon (a more accurate word than "hated"), our negative feelings were minor league compared to the at-times psychopathic hatred he felt toward his "enemies." When he was gone, and we could feel that "order" had been restored, we returned to the normal range of emotions; nowadays you can find plenty of Old New Leftists who look on Nixon's presidency almost with nostalgia.

The contrast with Clinton and his enemies is incredible. Surely, the most fascinating aspect of the 2000 campaign was the exit-poll finding that roughly a quarter of both Gore and Bush voters felt "seriously threatened" by the prospect that the other guy would win. As one of the former who certainly would have ticked that box, I know why "we" felt threatened; as I write these words, shortly after Bush has promised "reconsideration" of RU-486, we're reminded every day of what we feared: that thou-


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sands or millions of real people may be seriously hurt by the policies and appointments of the compassionate conservative. What exactly is it, though, that they fear from me and mine, and the president we more or less supported?

Here was a president, fully supported by his vice president, who achieved what not just the right, but a substantial majority of white Americans generally seemed to want: the abolition of welfare. (It is true but irrelevant that white people themselves were a majority of those on welfare. Despite that fact, "welfare" has always been a racialized issue, standing in—along with "school busing"—for opposition to real social integration long after formal segregation was legally abolished.) He gave fiscal conservatives and the religious right the virtual end of federal debt and a balanced budget, which in the immanentism of Christian fundamentalists had always somehow been a "biblical" issue. Indeed, it's hard to think of any president in American history who gave his political opponents more of their expressed wish list than Bill Clinton did, or who more faithfully followed out the line that "It's the economy, stupid," and then got no credit at all. In the words of the *Onion*'s parody of a George W. Bush address to the nation, "Our long national nightmare of peace and prosperity is finally over. . . together, we can put the triumphs of the recent past behind us."

As for Hillary Rodham Clinton, aside from botching a health-care "reform" that was never possible, what did she ever do? She was arrogant and humorless, like many of the friends or colleagues of anyone reading these pages, yet to whom we remain perfectly civil (as they to us despite our faults). She was probably a liar and occasionally corrupt, like many senators and governors and members of the House, not to mention the mayors of big cities, or small towns, or suburbs. All in all, an unexceptionally imperfect woman; yet the most worthless nonentities can raise millions of dollars simply by promising that they are going to oppose, attack, prosecute, or slander her. What is the immensity of this rage about? Of course it's not the economy, it's sex, stupid. But why? "Stand by your man," Tammy Wynette said; and Hillary Rodham Clinton has set all-time, all-everywhere records for standing by *her* man. And yet the heart of Tammy country may be where they hate Hillary the most. What is going on here?

I DON'T THINK what's going on is at all obscure. It is, in the person of Bill and Hillary, the ultimate betrayal of the patriarchal deal. Toni Morrison famously said that Bill Clinton was the first black president, and that is true in the sense she meant it, but it does not provide our explanation. Nowadays, except on the neo-Nazi and skinhead right, though race still provides plentiful fodder for contempt (as in the wars on drugs, crime, and welfare, not to mention the respectful attention that still gets paid to the pseudo-science of "IQ"), it does not generate the plain hatred that it used to. Lynching is as likely to be visited on gays as blacks, and abortion providers are most likely of all to be assassinated. In general, most of the decline-of-civilization rhetoric we hear nowadays is in one form or another about sex, not about race. Divorce, unwed teenage mothers, promiscuity, the "degeneration" of popular culture, and above all abortion: these are the hot-button issues on the right. Though in some cases they intertwine race and sex, the latter is almost always at their root. Even affirmative action, when it has to do with women in the military, causes as much gnashing of teeth as it does when it is about blacks in higher education. Let us remember that in 1992 the now secretary of state, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—a black man who could probably be elected president himself—disobeyed the first direct order given him by his new commander in chief and torpedoed the abolition of discrimination against gays in the military. For many whites, a good black man is one who knows and loves patriarchy when he sees it. Forget prosperity: keep in mind what's really important.

The patriarchal deal is very simple, but hard to sustain: against nature, one might say. The deal is that Leaders will be Men, and they will Set the Moral Tone for us all, by being publicly good father/husbands and visibly strong; in a word, manly. In Hegel's phrase, they provide Rectitude. Women can neither Set the Moral Tone nor provide Rectitude, because in

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a rightful order they are neither strong nor the heads of families; they are not manly. Instead, they are equally, but separately, feminine. They provide an example of fidelity and respectability, and in so doing they carry on the family upon which "civilization" is based. Therefore, a man who can't keep them under control could not possibly be a strong or good Leader.

A man in a leadership position must follow this program faithfully, and not violate taboos that are themselves part of the deal that patriarchy offers women. The taboos change over time (for example, women now defined as victims of rape or domestic abuse were once considered fair game), but the general principle remains the same: within these limits, the patriarchal male can screw around *in private* all he wants. A woman, however, cannot, because at the root of the patriarchal double standard, in the lingo of the anthropologists, is the fact that we can't ever really know who the father is, but we can (and damn well better) know who the mother is. This is the reason that, once it becomes easy and widespread, abortion is so horrific to patriarchalists. It calls the sanctity of motherhood, even the very nature of motherhood, into question; it enables *women* to screw around without fear of being caught out. Everything collapses; the deal is dead or dying.

What's crucial to the survival of the deal is its credibility. We must be able to go on believing in it, despite our private (or merely academic) knowledge of its absurdity. Thus, despite the achievements of the long feminist cultural revolution, acceptance of patriarchy and conformity to its conventions continue to be the sine qua non of success at the pinnacle of American public life. Women can get ahead—to the Senate or the cabinet, but if they want to be Leaders they must not flaunt any doubts they might have about the patriarchal lifestyle. Not just men but women have built their entire lives and systems of values around that deal, and that lifestyle; if it's just a bad mistake, what have their lives been worth?

To say, however, that Bill and Hillary have flaunted doubts about the patriarchal lifestyle is to laughably understate the case. They have destroyed the deal's credibility right out in the open for everyone to see. Indeed, the pattern of *public* violation (which means, simply, getting caught) followed by spousal forgiveness was evident even before the 1992 election. The favorite epithet for Bill Clinton among Washington insiders was "pussy-whipped." Equivalent epithets for Hillary were not lacking. The venom is understandable, in that for those who've bought into the patriarchal deal heart and soul the implications were terrifying. If *Bill Clinton* could be thought of as a Great Leader, then the patriarchal deal isn't necessary: any man, even a man who is "out of (patriarchal) control"; even a weak man; even, God help us, a gay man, might make a great president. Even a woman who doesn't believe in patriarchy (as Margaret Thatcher ostensibly did) and in the rightful rule of the dark suit, red tie brigade can become a Leader.

To many millions of Americans, this was the real and unbearable meaning of the original Clinton slogan that we were getting two presidents for the price of one—the health care fiasco being a visible token of the threat. Clinton's fate, and ultimately that of his anointed successor, was set right then and there. The natural order was being trashed; the Horror, the Horror!

Impeachment was the first, but failed, step toward restoring the natural order. (The deal being what it is, its credibility being already so thin, there is of necessity a much higher proportion of staunch patriarchalists in the seats of government than among the population at large.) The de-election of Gore is its final, necessary, triumph. It could not be borne, cannot be borne, that history might think of this, this sinful man, this *un-man* as, if not a Great Leader, at least a good and successful one. The *Onion's* parody is no parody after all. Clinton the failure would have been an enduring message of hope for the righteous; Clinton the success heralds the coming of the Antichrist. Of course, Tammy Wynette doesn't play here: you should stand by your man, but not by the Devil himself in the disguise of a Great Leader.

That is why, sadly, Gore's supporters, always on the defensive, were unable to work up the passion, the inspiring hatred, that we saw on the faces of the Bush demonstrators, heard in the voices of their spokespersons and pundits. Among Democrats, only the Congressional


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Black Caucus members, turning their backs and walking out of the seat of government after the recording of the Florida electoral "vote"—an action every Democrat should have emulated—reminded us that a truly shattering political event had just had its denouement. For the rabid right, it was absolutely clear that everything—civilization itself—was at stake.

Thus, the last legend is the most foolish one; the legend of the CNN/MSNBC pundits that the closeness of the election was due to a lack of issues dividing the electorate. To the contrary, closeness can—and among many, many millions in this case—did result from an unwillingness or inability to compromise sharply held differences. Even among white people, on the gender front at least, this was one of the most ideologically divisive elections ever; there will be more to come. We can only hope that the triumph of the counterrevolutionaries will prove to be short run; that the appropriation of the presidency aside, they are pushing against the tide. But a lot of people can get hurt in a short run. ●

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# The Higher Immorality, 2000

**Michael Kazin**

IF A PRESIDENTIAL election indicates the health of the body politic, America's civic condition may be hovering just this side of the intensive-care ward. Even by the low standard we've come to expect from the quadrennial circus, the 2000 contest oozed with verbal immorality and bad faith. Few *Dissent* readers will need convincing about Republican offenses. George W. Bush purred about "compassion" while he planned to block an increase in the minimum wage, cut funds for protecting the environment, and spend billions to "defend" the nation with a technology that doesn't work against a threat of foreign missiles that doesn't exist.

His clumsy opponent didn't fare much better. Al Gore tried to "go populist" against companies from which he and Bill Clinton had earlier solicited millions of dollars in contributions, then essentially retreated to the fiscal conservatism and free-market dogma that were always closer to his heart. He gained an edge in the popular vote because of the persistent cultural divide between crowded oceanside metropolises (where he scored a landslide) and the rest of the country on such matters as abortion, gun control, and whether a president who lies in public about his sex life should stay in office. According to exit polls, all the squabbles about plans to "save" Social Security, improve education, and subsidize pharmaceuticals for seniors blurred rather than sharpened the differences between Gore and Bush on these issues. "Watching the two candidates speak about their rival plans," wrote David Brooks (the nation's wittiest, least predictable conservative journalist), "was like watching an ad war between cellular phone rate plans: My plan gives you more choices! My plan gives you more minutes! My plan gives you free prescription drugs on weekends and holidays!"

The real scandal of the 2000 race was a joint sin of omission. Neither Gore nor Bush made more than a passing reference to problems of great significance and some urgency: the rising number of Americans without health insurance, the widening economic gap between people who write big campaign checks and those who clean their houses and wait on their tables, the billions of dollars still being spent on nuclear weapons, the twenty-five million Africans with HIV, or the encroaching crisis

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of global warming (despite Gore's having written a book about it). Ralph Nader, to his credit, at least protested the domestic outrages. But his fury at Gore and Clinton lured him into the unethical trap inhabited by radicals who prefer the rule of a principled enemy to that of a capricious ally. The ninety-three thousand Floridians who voted Green helped bring on five weeks of ruthless legal combat, in which each side sanctimoniously assured us that *its* loophole-hunting was in the service of democracy while the opposition was out to thwart the popular will. At last, our famously nonpartisan Supreme Court chose a winner.

Forty-five years ago, during another era of self-satisfaction, C. Wright Mills concluded his book *The Power Elite* with a furious indictment of "The Higher Immorality." "Crackpot realists," he dubbed politicians and their handlers from both parties who, "in the name of practicality . . . have projected a utopian image of capitalism." Mills thundered, "They have replaced the responsible interpretation of events with the disguise of events by a maze of public relations; respect for public debate with unshrewd notions of psychological warfare. . .the capacity to elaborate alternatives and gauge their consequences with the executive stance."

This jeremiad was clouded by nostalgia. Like Nader in 2000, Mills refused to make distinctions between those crackpot elitists who could be helpful to progressive causes (mostly labor, in the mid-fifties) and those who blocked their way. But his portrayal of public life midway through the Eisenhower era rather accurately matches our sorry class of politicians early in the reign of Bush the Younger.

NOW, AS THEN, the centrist rhetoric of both parties barely masks the intensity of closely matched partisan combat. Now, as then, a long spell of macroeconomic success allows candidates and officeholders to neglect yawning inequalities and mass suffering, to ignore the problems of people who are not mobilized to fight for themselves. Now, even more than in the fifties, national politicians strive to avoid giving offense rather than to inspire participation. What Mills called public relations no longer disguises events; it *is* the event, an unending contest of spin and counter-spin that enthralls journalists and others in that select group of Americans who consume politics on a regular basis.

George W. Bush, the first president with an M.B.A., exudes the easy confidence of a CEO who has nothing very important to sell but is blessed with an efficient staff and a tested marketing strategy to help him sell it. As such, he is a fitting chief executive for that majority of voters who oppose new federal programs but don't favor eliminating any that benefit them. Since Eisenhower, sober-minded Republicans have recognized the power of this mass opinion and, conservative rhetoric aside, usually have governed accordingly.

On the other hand, Democrats adopt a business strategy at their peril. In the century since William Jennings Bryan captured the presidential nomination of 1896 with his scorn for the trickle-down economics of Wall Street and the trusts, the party has burnished an image of itself as the champion of egalitarian reform and corporate regulation. Until the 1940s, this meant equality for white men only, but the movement for black freedom and then the upsurge of feminism forced party activists to accept a broader, more tolerant meaning of the term. Every Democrat who gained the White House in the twentieth century (Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Jimmy Carter, and Bill Clinton) spoke for lofty liberal ideas, even if his performance in office inevitably fell short of the promise. Most of the Democrats who lost (Walter Mondale, Michael Dukakis, and Gore, but also those justifiably forgotten nominees, Alton Parker and John W. Davis) touted their managerial skills and experience. Uncomfortable in the role of crusading populist, they played it quite badly.

Fortunately, in the campaign and the battle for Florida that followed, rank-and-file Democrats demonstrated how vital the party's ideological heritage remains. African-American voters, organized by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and members of the Congressional Black Caucus, exposed the structural barriers to an equal franchise. Unionists of all races gave Gore a twenty-two-point advantage in the national vote and put him over the top in close Midwestern


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states, with strong warnings about the GOP's fondness for union-busting and privatizing Social Security. Pro-choice, gay rights, and environmental organizers reminded their supporters (including many who flirted with Nader) of the difficult and defensive legal battles to come if Bush were victorious. This activist coalition was full of energy—and reasonably well financed and remarkably free of internal disputes. Its members gave Al Gore more help than his miserable campaign deserved.

If the Democratic Party, as Bill Bradley recently claimed, "remains a vibrant institution holding out real hope for social and political change," then it's mainly the grassroots forces who make it so. But they still need leaders.

Bill Clinton did little to encourage Democratic hopefuls to view the party as a vehicle for promoting a reform agenda in any area but cultural tolerance. Pundits fixed on his personality to explain both his modest successes and his embarrassing failures, and the insecure president was not inclined to disagree. Thus, Clinton's clever strategy of "triangulation" after Democrats lost the House in 1994 blocked the growth of the right, both as a movement and in Congress. But he bequeathed no liberal vision or coherent policy agenda for either his uninspiring vice president or Democratic candidates for the House to run on. Absent such convictions, the GOP feasted on the image of a man alone with his fundraisers, his celebrities, and his undisciplined libido.

In a year when millions of voters longed for a candidate who could inspire some civic fervor (if he'd been nominated, John McCain would likely have won with ease), Gore's vow to work like hell if he gained the White House lacked a clear statement of a noble goal or two that all that diligence was supposed to achieve. Rank-and-file Democrats, in Florida and elsewhere, mobilized to stop the specter of Reaganism redux; few expected their nominee to do more than preserve the status quo.

There is, of course, no simple path to reviving a liberal left. Bush the Younger realizes the day of conservative "revolution" has passed; he seeks to build a new coalition on the right by muffling old controversies rather than sharpening them. Figures like Ashcroft, Jesse Helms, and Tom DeLay have real clout, of course, but the administration's public face is full of "compassion," "inclusion," and, yes, "diversity." For all their ardor, labor, the NAACP, the National Organization for Women, and the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League have neither the numbers, the resources, nor the public credibility to lead a popular insurgency that can do more than play defense for the next four years. And the antiglobalization left is, at least so far, visible mainly as a roving demonstration.

Yet, one should never underestimate the potency of the ideal of egalitarian justice, which unites the fragments of the American left, at least in spirit. Back in 1956, C. Wright Mills's depressing critique hit bookstores just as thousands of black citizens in Montgomery, Alabama, were walking to work instead of paying bus fares to a city that violated their human rights. As ever, the only reliable response to the higher immorality is the higher ethic of ordinary people on the move. ●

Michael Kazin teaches history at Georgetown University. His most recent book, co-authored with Maurice Isserman, is *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*.

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# Dilemmas of the Dollar

**Patricia Cayo Sexton**

OUR SACRED DOLLAR, reigning deity of the world's currencies, has able prophets and apostles. And it needs them. Though it has soared this past decade, the dollar now faces rising domestic and global forces that seek to humble it. Do the challenges matter? Yes, but far more to the new economy than to the old one of industry and exports. The old one liked a humbler, cheaper dollar, nice for exports. The new economy needs a dollar strong enough to buy up the mountains of cheap imports that keep consumers happy, inflation low, and the economy growing. It also needs a dollar strong enough to lure from abroad the huge flow of capital that helps pay for these imports and, again, for a surging economy. When the surge slows down, however, the strategy of delivering the previously unheard-of combination of low inflation plus low unemployment is challenged.

This much-applauded strategy, fine-tuned by its makers, has led us closer to a full-employment economy than we've been in half a century, a journey about which we can surely rejoice—never mind the quality of jobs, the turmoil, the costs of rising inequality. The question is, will the strategy continue to work? On the downside, at the command of the U.S. Supreme Court, we have lost the team that devised the game, knew its rules, and might have improvised ways to keep winning it. Now the game appears far harder than even, say, championship chess, given the incipient weakness of both the dollar and the new economy—and also the sharp conflict between the two for the favors of the Federal Reserve Board. It is doubtful that even a wealth of charming smirks from the Oval Office will give us the answers we need.

Three references to the dollar's "affairs," as I call them, might give us some sense of the setting in which the dollar—a truer emblem of the nation's strength than the stars and stripes—may be humbled and some of the forces that may do it. The three affairs involve (1) competing currencies and backlash from our own multinationals; (2) indebtedness, global and domestic; and (3) distress in financial markets (securities and banking) and in the "fundamentals" of the real economy.

## The Euro Affair

The dollar's enduring romp with the euro has shown both its global power and its emerging fragility. The euro was poised by its makers to challenge the dollar as the world's leading currency, or at least to become a sturdy second; but by the new millennium, it had taken an almost fatal fall of 30 percent since its birth date. The dollar did not rush to pick it up.

Predictably, Clyde Summers, then treasury secretary and able lifeguard of the dollar, said "no" to helping revive the euro and an emphatic "yes" to letting it plumb its lower depths. A rescue might have endorsed the euro as a safe harbor for investments, perhaps safer and better than the dollar, and that would not do. A strong dollar, as Summers said, "is in our national interest because it has helped to hold down inflationary pressures and capital costs." In a final global twist, and despite the secretary's warm regard for the dollar, a shrill "yes" drowned out his "no," the "yes" coming from our very own globalized presence in Europe—the multinationals, big and small.

The sliding euro, the multis said, was hurting their dollarized profits, their stock prices, and even the stock market itself. Beyond that, some said, it endangered our need for stable trading partners. The loudest laments came from giants such as Intel and Nike. Parallel to these complaints were the even louder laments


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of U.S. multis operating stateside, this time about the dollar. It was far too strong, giants such as auto said, and it was crippling sales. Falling profits at Chrysler and elsewhere underscored such complaints. They wanted a euro rescue, and they finally got it—despite the strong opposition of congressional conservatives.

As of 2001, both the euro and the European Union were staging comebacks and raising questions about whether the euro might yet qualify as a world leader. After all, the total size and shape of its eleven supporting nations is roughly similar to that of the dollar's parent. European capital has been reversing its flow out of the United States and back to its euro roots. Flows into U.S. securities and acquisitions ($167 billion in the first nine months of 2000 alone) have abated. Among euro zone supporters, the *Economist* insists that the euro's economic base is strong, that shrinkage in the euro was an anomaly, and that "contrary to popular belief, it is the euro area, not America, that is more likely to see faster growth and better investment opportunities over the next decade."

Some skeptics claim that the euro scare was not an anomaly, but the result of a calculated act of the giant hedge funds that bet against weakening currencies, then try to disable them—a charge also made during the fall of Asian and other currencies. All we know for sure about these highly secretive funds is that currency speculation is a main occupation, and that some of them are big and rich enough to tip over currencies. We should know more, but, alas, the touted global information age has failed to inform us properly about these globe-shaking matters.

Some still ask, should the dollar have helped the euro back to health? What we know is that crashing currencies can ignite global conflagrations. In 1997, the devaluation of the Thai baht sparked a fire that swept across Asia and major world currencies. A total disaster was averted by a rescue from abroad. None of the afflicted areas fully recuperated, but few have crashed (yet). However, that binge of near-calamities rocked the very ground on which we stand, as the currency dominos fell around the world. The Asian collapse led to the Russian devaluation, which in turn caused the loud crash of our own pride and joy, Long Term Capital Management. Although the Russian crisis inspired no significant rescue (a huge challenge, to be sure), a bailout followed the Long Term crash with stunning speed and success, as the Federal Reserve pushed the private sector into financing a revival. It was a happy blend of public sector initiatives and private sector money—infinitely fairer than the usual one of private troublemakers and public treasury payouts.

One point to make about the euro is that globalization suffers from symptoms not yet properly diagnosed or treated. Clearly, far more questions than answers remain about the affair. Can our supreme dollar and our potent global corporations live together happily? Is it OK to injure or ignore trading partners in order to keep foreign money flowing into our own pot, or is that counter-productive? Have we rushed too far and too fast into globalization? If the euro rises, how far (if at all) will the dollar fall? If you have answers to these or other puzzling questions, please write.

### The "Free Trade" Affair

Of more pressing concern for the dollar than the euro affair is its dalliance with the nation's grossly obese trade and current account debts—the import duties, in effect, on our lust for foreign goods and money. "Trade" here refers to our annual *deficit* of trade in goods and services (U.S.$265 billion for one year alone, 1999) and "current account" to our *deficit* in trade *and money* (U.S.$338 billion in 1999), a broader measure of deficit. The United States has run a current account deficit for twenty years, with steep rises in recent years. In 1999, this deficit grew an astonishing 53.6 percent over the 1998 figure. Trade deficits also rocketed upward, along with our global aspirations; in 2000, imports were 30 percent greater than exports, compared with 20 percent in 1999 and 12 percent in 1998.

The trade affair is a publicly noted one—barely—but by no means a public scandal, even though it deserves the name more than do the flimsy Monica or Lincoln bedroom affairs. Perhaps the desire to protect the pure reputation of globalized "free trade" inspires the semi-secrecy of these figures. Occasionally, small notes

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are posted in the media about the annual deficits. But in response to any citizen alarms set off by the scary news, the word goes out from on high: "not to worry; it's only a small part of our GDP [Gross Domestic Product]" (4.2 percent in 1999, for instance). These soft words may calm panic, but they don't tell the whole story.

Although the public learns of deficit figures in dribbles, it is saved from confronting the cumulative or *total debt* figure—this year's deficits *plus* all those remaining from past years. This illusive and amazing figure is available, however, and it is called the Net International Investment Position, a total of some *U.S. $1.5 trillion* of debt in 1999 or roughly 16 percent of the U.S. $9.2 trillion GDP.

This debt is bad news for the dollar. Indeed, it is the debt's chief victim, according to Catherine L. Mann's report *Is the U.S. Trade Deficit Sustainable?* Debt is at a level, she concludes, that makes the economy vulnerable to a fall in the dollar's value, a rise in inflation and interest rates, and a growth slowdown. Endorsements of her view come from others. The celebrated Robert Rubin, former treasury secretary, noted that "the international system cannot sustain indefinitely the large current account imbalances." Former secretary Summers added that such debt "distorts the patterns of domestic economic activity."

THE DEBT can't be sustained, economist Fred Bergston says, "without ultimately facing a very sharp fall in the exchange rate, which in the current circumstances of the U.S. economy could be a killer. . . [it] is the single biggest threat to the current expansion of the economy." A twelve-member bipartisan congressional commission, after two years of study, issued a 350-page report unanimously endorsing, in effect, all the above statements. The failure of the commission to agree on solutions, however, indicates that the managers of the new economy need to return to the drawing board. Factored into their thinking, of course, should be the sound and familiar idea of greatly extending our export economy.

Other big debts that drag on the dollar economy—acutely when they can't be paid off—are more domestic than global. The mounting *personal and household debt* reached U.S.$1.3 trillion in 1998, or some 12 percent of GDP. Personal savings for the first time in the postwar era entered the red, so that now, as a collectivity, Americans have *less* than no savings. Consumer buying and confidence are, as we know, key economic indicators simply because they sustain and grow the economy. Recessions are almost always preceded by a decline in consumer confidence, which can be quickly lost but only slowly recovered. The confidence index lost thirty points in five months of 1990 and took three years to return. In December 2000, a University of Michigan survey of consumer confidence reported the fourth largest drop in the history of its surveys; and late in 2000, a *Wall Street Journal* survey found that 43 percent of Americans expected a recession within thirteen months—a 17 percent rise in just two months. Bankruptcy, of course, is the terminal point of unpayable debt. In 2000, personal filings rose 10 percent to 1.26 million, with another estimated increase of 15 percent in 2001.

*Business debt* stood at 46.1 percent of GDP in 2000, higher than ever before. As recently as 1995, it was only 38 percent. Corporate America has been described as being over borrowed, overspent, and over capacity. Presumably cued by computers to just-in-time planning, the information age either neglected to cue the computers or the computers failed to respond. At any rate, we have seen grave distress afflicting two major industries—auto production and finance (both banking and securities). The Bank of America reported U.S.$1 billion in bad loans in the fourth quarter of 2000, and distress was found but barely reported throughout the banking industry. Securities were the first to tumble; we know that shocking story. Debt everywhere sorely afflicts the dollar.

In a sense, the economy is built on credit, IOUs issued by virtually all sellers and lenders. Government and business borrow huge sums from bond buyers. Citizens borrow huge sums from government and banks in the form of mortgages. And they borrow routinely from various sellers and money lenders, often with easily available credit cards or simply "on account." The average credit-worthy household now holds thirteen credit cards and $7,500 in credit card balances. Buyers of stocks often buy


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shares on margin or on credit. The craze has produced the "securitization of credit," a late and remarkable innovation, involving the buying and selling of *credit debt*!

The domestic market is awash in credit and debt, much of it useful and necessary but also, in excess, dangerous for the dollar and the economy. In the 1920s, lavish credit and wild spending led to a collapse of banks and other big lenders in 1929—and to the Great Depression of the 1930s. In Japan and the Asian Rim, credit played a similar role during the 1990s. Credit is a proven but unheeded destroyer. Federal Reserve Board chief Alan Greenspan puts it this way: "The best insurance against nasty surprises in a complex system is to limit the amount of debt in the system." A simple spark, for instance, in the householder's ability to meet mortgage payments, can set off a fire in banking and bring down the whole house of cards. If and when the dollar slips from its state of grace, we will be entitled to suspect that debt will be giving it a big shove.

### The High-Tech Affair

The deified dollar is in many respects more like a pawn than a god, moved as it is by forces largely outside its control. Since wars are fought over it, it is hard to remember that the dollar is just a bit of printed paper that in bad times is hardly worth the paper it's printed on—like its forebear, the Continental. Its value as a currency is affected by forces previously described—by public and private strategies, foreign competitors, and by the real economy, most notably in recent years by high tech and the securities markets that sell high tech.

We are by now well acquainted with happenings in the anarchic tech-stock arena and with the big bears, risen at last from hibernation to warn us about dangers. Michael J. Mandel's grisly volume *The Coming Internet Depression* offered the worst-case scenario: what had been touted as our designated saviors of the new economy, high tech and high finance, he says, have failed us—as tulip zealots did in the seventeenth century—and their failures may end it all. Mandel's free-fall scenario features a sharp retreat in the venture capital funds that had put an annual U.S. $100 billion into start-up firms, a sum rivaling U.S. spending on research and development and far outpacing R&D's yield of patented innovations. Likely result, he says: few start-ups, slow growth, the usual plague of trouble—and *depression*. A truly depressing view.

On the cheerier side, high-tech apostles flourish, but they cannot deny the big hits taken by tech stocks and the subsequent slippage in the real economy. A mine of potential tech stars remains out there, the optimist says, to put the show back on the road; he may lack believers, however, until he shows them the money to finance new stars. As for the dollar, it is clearly on a depression's hit list, yet its glory and its buoyancy cannot be forgotten.

The dollar's role as a pawn in all these happenings is varied and central, especially in the grossly misused and virtually unregulated power of money markets—in stocks and securities (as in the tech shock), in the multiple misuses of credit debt at home and abroad (Asian and other debacles for which we still pay), in the manipulation of currencies, in the zeal to penetrate (and control?) global financial markets, in the often negative influences on the real economy, in the effort to portray interest-rate manipulation as an elixir of all economic ailments, and so on.

We are told not to speak bad or sad words about the economy. People might hear, get scared, and lose their confidence. Our non-elected president chooses to violate the rule; not, it would seem, out of concern or conviction, but out of a need to rationalize an attempt to jar a sluggish economy by the most dubious means—heaping enormous tax rewards on his wealthy political backers.

The economy, elevated so much by hype, is in large part a confidence game, built on a fragile base of deceit and misguided trust. Yet facts and truth must have their way, if only we can make them clear. The smaller players and the innocent are least likely to hear them when they're hushed. Maybe the Supremes and their protegé will save the day, perhaps with military solutions.

Don't bet on anything. ●

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# The War Racket

**Douglas W. Payne**

THE YEAR 2000 was the worst for the U.S. stock market in nearly two decades—but not for weapons makers. The share prices of the two biggest military contractors, Lockheed Martin and Boeing, hit new highs, while the Standard & Poor's Aerospace/Defense Index was up nearly 35 percent, outperforming most other sectors. And although the past, as they say, is no guarantee of future returns, two developments at the end of December seemed to augur greater profits yet for those in on the war trade—the proposed sale of Lockheed advanced fighter planes to Chile and the appointment of inveterate Star Warrior Donald Rumsfeld as defense secretary in the Bush administration. The first, coupled with a big military aid package to Colombia, indicated how far the Clinton White House went to enhance the welfare of U.S. arms manufacturers. The second signaled that President Bush might be even more weapons-friendly than his predecessor, particularly when it comes to the militarization of space. For those enamored of bipartisanship, it's hard to top the mutual servicing of the war industry by the Democrats and the Republicans.

In 1992, candidate Clinton pledged that with the end of the cold war the Democrats would adopt a less militaristic approach. He campaigned as an arms-control advocate and promised to press for strong international limits "on the dangerous and wasteful flow of weapons to troubled regions," as stated in the Democratic platform. With Clinton's election, some believed a substantial peace dividend was in the offing. Arms industry trade publications fretted that the U.S. defense budget could end up being cut by more than half to $150 billion.

They needn't have worried. By the end of Clinton's first year, the primacy of commercialism in his foreign policy was well established, with particular emphasis on government support for U.S. arms makers looking to expand their markets abroad, especially in the developing world. When the Clinton presidency drew to a close, the U.S. defense budget was nearly $310 billion, and, as noted by William D. Hartung, director of the Arms Trade Resource Center at the World Policy Institute in New York, Clinton had utilized military force more often than any U.S. president since the Vietnam War, including Ronald Reagan. Then, in the 2000 presidential campaign, Democratic nominee Al Gore promised to hike military spending by more than double what George W. Bush proposed. As Hartung wrote in the *Progressive*, "It looks like the Pentagon and the weapons makers can break out the champagne regardless of who wins in November."

The flourishing of the war industry during a time of relative peace is a tale of big-dollar lobbying, revolving-door careers, influence peddling, and political expediency. Much of it has been documented by Hartung and such groups as the Center for Defense Information, the Council for a Livable World, the Center for International Policy, and the Federation of American Scientists, as well as by investigators at *Mother Jones* magazine, including Ken Silverstein, author of *Private Warriors*, a close look at how old cold warriors have profited by scheming to keep the United States on a permanent war footing. Yet little of the work of these arms trade monitors gets into the mainstream media. Starting with the Gulf War, network television—particularly CNN—has often seemed more like an infomercial for high-tech weaponry. Newspaper coverage of the arms industry is generally found in the business pages, where the concerns are corporate earnings and stock prices, not whether U.S.-made attack


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helicopters are being used against civilian populations in, say, Turkey or Colombia.

### The Bottom Line

It was the late Ron Brown, Clinton's first secretary of commerce, who made clear the Clinton administration's bottom-line approach to weapons exports. Speaking for the president at the 1993 Paris Air Show, he told U.S. aerospace and defense contractors, "We will work with you to help you find buyers for your products in the world marketplace, and then we will work to help you close the deal." The assistance would include support from federal agencies such as the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), which insures the operations of U.S. companies doing business abroad, and the Export-Import Bank, which provides below-market-rate loans to countries buying U.S. goods.

The State Department followed Commerce's lead, as it would throughout much of the Clinton administration. Secretary of State Warren Christopher in 1993 instructed U.S. embassies "to support overseas marketing efforts of American companies bidding on defense contracts." It became State Department policy that personnel stationed at U.S. embassies would be graded for promotion based in part on how well they assisted U.S. arms companies in making export sales, with public praise for those making substantial contributions. David B. Hermelin, a former U.S. ambassador to Norway, was even hailed in his obituary in the *New York Times* by a State Department official for having helped close a deal for Lockheed to provide the missile systems for Norwegian warships.

By the end of Clinton's first term, according to the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, around 6,400 Commerce, State, and Defense Department employees were working full time to help weapons makers increase foreign sales, and the U.S. government was spending up to $7.5 billion a year supporting the arms industry through a combination of tax breaks, subsidized loans, promotional programs, and outright grants. John Mikels, vice president of the Hughes missile division, said, "We've all been pretty pleasantly surprised by Clinton. . . . I would say it's been a dramatic turn." According to Joel Johnson, a spokesperson for the Aerospace Industries Association, "The Clinton people are very supportive of specific sales. They are more dynamic than any administration we've seen."

The arms industry wanted more. In spring 1997, Oscar Arias, the former Costa Rican president who won the Nobel Peace prize a decade earlier, was in New York as part of an effort to get the United Nations to adopt an international code of conduct governing conventional arms sales. Lockheed was lobbying against the effort and distributing brochures, including one slipped under the door of Arias's hotel room. It touted the company's prospects for weapons sales in Latin America, particularly its F-16 fighter, and projected that the region would provide a market of up to $15 billion over the next decade. The catch was that President Jimmy Carter had instituted a ban on sales of high-tech weapons to Latin America that had been maintained through two successive Republican administrations.

However, while Arias and other Nobel laureates struggled without much success at the United Nations, the arms industry's muscular lobbying, fueled by hefty campaign contributions on both sides of the aisle, was about to pay off in Washington. The Pentagon was already on board for lifting the ban, as then secretary of defense William Perry was hoping to fatten his accounts by selling older model U.S. Air Force jets south of the border. Perry would eventually go on to join the boards of Boeing and United Technologies (UT), another U.S. weapons giant discussed below in relation to Colombia. Meanwhile, thirty-eight senators and seventy-eight representatives who had received more than a million dollars from political action committees controlled by Lockheed and other manufacturers signed a letter to Secretary of State Christopher urging that the ban be lifted. In the 1996 campaign cycle, the arms industry had contributed a total of nearly $12 million to both parties. Christopher, who had been on the board of Lockheed following a stint at the State Department under Jimmy Carter, joined Perry in recommending to Clinton that the ban be rescinded, which it was in August 1997.

By Clinton's last year, international arms

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sales had surged, and the United States had solidified its position as the world's biggest dealer. U.S. companies controlled better than a third of the global market, more than all European companies combined, with more than three-quarters of U.S. sales going to developing nations, according to a Congressional Research Service report cited by the *New York Times*. The *Times* did not relate that one of every two dollars in U.S. arms export revenues came from U.S. taxpayers, an enormous subsidy that undermines the claims of the arms industry and government officials that profits from weapons exports save American jobs. "Free market" really means systematic U.S. government intervention on behalf of U.S. corporations doing business abroad.

Clinton's final year also saw the initial dividends from the reopened Latin American market. A number of transactions with Latin countries had been put on hold when the region was buffeted by the global currency crisis in 1998. In the last days of 2000, however, the first major deal came through with the announcement that Chile would purchase ten to twelve F-16s from Lockheed for around $600 million. A senior equity analyst at Prudential Securities in New York said, "Lockheed has been relying on international business. This is definitely a good thing." With Brazil reportedly next up for a fighter-jet acquisition from Lockheed, the company's shares finished the year with a 52 percent gain.

Critics of the sale predicted that it would set off a regional arms race, a pleasing prospect for Lockheed and other weapons makers who fare best when international tensions and conflict are on the rise. Human rights groups warned that an arms race would enhance the influence of Latin militaries at the expense of still shaky civilian governments and take funds away from social programs in a region still plagued by poverty and inequality. The Clinton administration seemed not to share such concerns. In fact, in a written statement, the White House asserted that selling weapons to Latin America would help stabilize the region and strengthen the transition to democracy. One U.S. official who was promoting U.S. companies at an arms exposition in Rio de Janeiro in 1999 suggested to Ken Silverstein that a little less democracy in Latin America might even be okay, saying, "Things were different when the military ran things down here. Then they didn't have to go running to Congress for money."

### The Colombian Quagmire

The nearly $1 billion military-aid package for Colombia as it descended into drug-fueled civil war was also a moneymaker for U.S. arms manufacturers. At first, the Clinton administration was wary of such involvement in what a number of observers believe will be the next quagmire. But the White House, along with many skeptical Democrats on Capitol Hill, was eventually brought around through the efforts of U.S. corporations, led by weapons makers and oil companies, as detailed by the *Legal Times* and *Newsweek*.

U.S. officials told *Newsweek* that a major factor in turning the tide was a survey by Democratic pollster Mark Mellman that showed the public to be increasingly worried about drug use and inclined to blame Democrats. Mellman told the White House that illegal drugs was one issue where the Republicans held a clear edge in the 2000 election. What he didn't advertise was that his poll was commissioned by Lockheed, which, as the manufacturer of P-3 radar planes used to track drug smugglers, has consistently pushed for greater drug-war funding.

Meanwhile, the U.S.-Colombia Business Partnership—a consortium of U.S. multinationals with interests in Colombia, including Colgate-Palmolive, BP Amoco, Pfizer, and construction giant Bechtel—pressed Washington on narco-trafficking's threat to business. Headed by Michael Skol, Clinton's deputy assistant secretary of state for Latin America until 1997, the group weighed in with generous political contributions across the board. One of the prime movers was Occidental Petroleum, which said that its installation in Colombia—now the number-seven supplier of oil to the U.S.—was losing millions because of attacks by left-wing guerrillas flush with drug money, and that U.S. access to a large untapped pool of petroleum was in jeopardy.

In 1999, the pliable Colombian government gave Occidental permission to expand its



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drilling onto the ancestral lands of the U'wa Indians. U.S. environmental and indigenous rights groups appealed on behalf of the U'was to Vice President Gore. But as the Center for Public Integrity in Washington reminded us, Gore's father, the late Senator Albert Gore, was on the board of Occidental, and since the 1960s, the company has paid the vice president's family $20,000 a year for unused mineral rights on its land. Occidental also has contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to Gore and to the Democratic National Committee, whose treasurer in the 1996 election, Scott Pastrick, was hired by Occidental to lobby on Colombia. Gore declined to meet with U'wa representatives who came to Washington and did not respond to calls by the *Legal Times* seeking comment.

Another Colombia aid booster was tobacco giant Philip Morris, whose lobbyists quietly pressed the issue on Capitol Hill, as reported by *Legal Times* correspondent Sam Loewenberg. What was the company's interest? In 2000, it was sued in New York federal court by state governments in Colombia for allegedly working with Colombian drug traffickers to combine cigarette smuggling with the laundering of drug proceeds. Congressional aides said Philip Morris was lobbying at the request of Colombia. Anti-smoking groups charged that the company was angling for the Colombian federal government to intervene with state authorities to drop the suit. The Colombian ambassador in Washington told Loewenberg he had asked numerous U.S. corporations to push for the aid package, but not Philip Morris—although he did say that he had spoken with the company regarding cigarette smuggling and the lawsuit.

Among the most aggressive advocates were two U.S. helicopter suppliers: Connecticut-based UT, whose Sikorsky aircraft division manufactures the Black Hawk, a lethal machine well known to the Kurds in southeastern Turkey and the residents of Chiapas, Mexico, and Texas-based Textron, maker of the Bell Huey. The two companies gave more than a million dollars to both parties between 1997 and 1999, with UT adroitly shifting a majority of its soft money to the Democrats as the Colombia aid issue emerged. It was not surprising that when the White House came out with its Colombia proposal, it earmarked hundreds of millions of dollars to purchase dozens of helicopters from both companies.

Following the inclusion of the Black Hawks, Connecticut's two U.S. Senators, Christopher Dodd and Joseph Lieberman, became proponents of the aid package, as did Connecticut Rep. Sam Gejdenson. All denied they were influenced by the selection of a Connecticut company. But former representative Gerald Solomon (R-N.Y.), a Beltway lobbyist who was working in support of the aid, said that gaining the backing of liberals such as Dodd and Gejdenson by appealing to home-state interests was "absolutely crucial." He said, "It's all part of the game." Carlos M. Salinas of Amnesty International noted that Gejdenson and Dodd had consistently opposed U.S. military aid in Central America and said he had hoped they "would have been more helpful on this issue." According to the Center for Responsive Politics, between 1997 and early 2000, Dodd received $33,200 from UT and Gejdenson, $19,000.

The White House point men on Colombia were drug czar Barry McCaffrey and Thomas Pickering, undersecretary of state for political affairs. While testifying before Congress, McCaffrey extolled the virtues of the Black Hawk, saying, "These are the best helicopters in the world. The next time you see me, I'll probably be peddling them, I hope." McCaffrey's spokesperson later said the general was kidding. A few months after the aid package was passed, it was announced that Pickering was resigning to join Boeing as a senior vice president. Boeing CEO Phil Condit said Pickering, who had held diplomatic posts on five continents, would "form a State Department for Boeing" to assess the company's interests in every foreign country.

In response to the concerns of Amnesty International and other rights groups—and to increase support among undecided Democrats—certain conditions were inserted into the aid legislation. One was that the Colombian army move to break its ties with right-wing death squads responsible for 35,000 civilian

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slayings during the 1990s. Under White House pressure, however, Congress made the conditions optional, and in August 2000, with no evidence of Colombian compliance, President Clinton quietly waived them—to the satisfaction of the makers of Black Hawks and Hueys and to the pleasure of General Dynamics, the manufacturer of Gau-19 Gatling guns with which the Black Hawks were to be outfitted. The Gau-19 fires .50-caliber ammunition at thirty-three-rounds-per-second at a cost of $4 a round.

Because both parties supported the military approach in Colombia, it was not an issue in the 2000 campaign. At one point the Bush camp seemed to endorse an even tougher line. Robert Zoellick, a top foreign policy adviser and now U.S. trade representative in the Bush cabinet, told the Council on Foreign Relations that it would probably be necessary to use greater force and to apply it directly against the guerrillas. That cheered Occidental because the insurgents are expert at blowing up the company's pipelines. Arms makers were pleased by the prospects of greater military assistance to Colombia—not to mention the likelihood of the conflict spilling over into neighboring countries—and their lobbyists were soon documenting battlefield gains by the guerrillas to buttress the argument for greater spending.

THE CANDIDATES didn't spend much time on broader military issues, either. Bush criticized the Democrats for being weak on defense and promised to increase military spending by $45 billion over ten years. Gore responded that he was not weak and vowed to increase spending by $100 billion over the same period. Ralph Nader questioned Pentagon spending, but was excluded from the debates.

With regard to national missile defense (NMD), there were few differences between Bush and Gore. Initially, the Clinton administration opposed the project, with Clinton vowing in 1993 to bring most Star Wars-type research to a halt. But that commitment didn't last, thanks in large part to the efforts of a group of former national security insiders led by Frank Gaffney, a Reagan-era Pentagon official and one of the "private warriors" profiled by Silverstein. Gaffney heads the Center for Security Policy in Washington, a think tank and advocacy shop whose board includes cold war icons such as Jeane Kirkpatrick, no less than four Lockheed executives, and two from Boeing. The center opposes virtually any form of arms control and has relied on defense contractors for up to a quarter of its budget, with Boeing, the primary contractor on NMD projects, and Lockheed, Raytheon, and other subcontractors among the most generous donors. Contributions are tax deductible, another government subsidy to the industry.

Gaffney's main achievement on behalf of NMD was spearheading the effort that convinced Congress to create a commission to assess ballistic missile threats against the U.S. It was chaired by Donald Rumsfeld, former and future secretary of defense and an adviser and donor to the center, and included mostly Star Wars champions. Its ominous and, critics say, exaggerated portrayal of a potential threat from a North Korean, Iranian, or Iraqi missile attack caused enough stir that the Clinton administration reversed itself again. Clinton signed legislation that mandated deployment of an anti-missile system "as soon as technologically possible," with analysts saying it would take $60 billion to get it done. Oscar Arias noted that, according to the U.N. Development Program, investing that amount over the course of ten years would be enough to provide basic education to the entire population of the developing world. The Center for Security Policy awarded Rumsfeld its Keeper of the Flame award, previously given to Newt Gingrich and Malcolm Forbes, Jr., among others.

The two national missile defense tests conducted in 2000 were failures. The defense industry, despite $130 billion spent on Stars Wars research since Ronald Reagan, still couldn't get a "kill vehicle"—the critical component of the system—to hit a moving target. Then, with questions about cost overruns and mismanagement among NMD contractors reappearing in the media, Clinton deferred a decision on deployment to the next administration. Gore supported Clinton in this, but aides reiterated that the vice president still backed NMD and, with the election looming, his campaign came out


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with a television ad highlighting Gore's support for the MX missile under Reagan and the Gulf War under Bush's father.

NMD proponents were more than pleased when Bush named Rumsfeld secretary of defense. Rumsfeld has advocated a more extensive missile defense system than the model proposed by Clinton, one that includes an array of space-based weapons and is expected to cost $120 billion. An analyst for the Teal Group, a Virginia-based aerospace research firm, said, "Rumsfeld's appointment is the single most important indicator that the Bush administration is serious about national missile defense. Lots of money is going to be poured into it."

Rumsfeld is an ardent backer of air power, too, and in recent years has called for building more B-2 bombers, which are manufactured by Northrup Grumman and, at $2.2 billion per copy, are the most expensive planes ever made. He also has advocated forging ahead with the Air Force's new F-22 fighter jet, which is produced by Lockheed. There were concerns within the industry because both aircraft continued to be criticized for cost overruns. But contractors, particularly Lockheed, had reason to believe they would be treated more favorably under Bush than they were during the Clinton years. As noted by Hartung and Michelle Ciarrocca, Bush has been close to Lockheed for years, and when governor of Texas even tried to give the company a contract to operate the state's welfare system, before backing down in the face of public protests. Lynne Cheney, wife of Vice President Dick Cheney, has been on the board of Lockheed, as well as a number of other corporations that do business with the U.S. government.

As Rumsfeld's appointment sailed through Congress, a number of Republican heavyweights stepped forward to support his nomination. The appearance of one of them, Frank Carlucci, indicates that with George W. in the White House a closer look at the Carlyle Group is warranted. Carlucci was identified by most media simply as a former defense secretary. But for more than a decade, Carlucci has been the chair of Carlyle, a multibillion-dollar private investment and buyout firm whose various acquisitions have made it one of the top dozen defense contractors in the United States, ahead of such companies as General Electric and Rockwell International.

Founded in Washington, D.C., less than a decade and a half ago, Carlyle is now the thirteenth largest investment group in the world. Its managing directors include James A. Baker III, who was secretary of state in the first Bush administration and George W.'s consigliere during the Florida recounts, as well as Richard Darman, former President Bush's budget director. The former president himself holds the title of senior adviser and is a member of Carlyle's Asian board. His Gulf War cohort, former British prime minister John Major, is on the firm's European board, and both are paid to facilitate access to government officials in countries such as Saudi Arabia, where a Carlyle subsidiary won the contract to train the Saudi defense force. With Bush's son now in the White House, paying to get into the Oval Office shouldn't be necessary.

When it comes to the war racket, the transition from Clinton to Bush should be smooth. As the Clinton years were ending, military analyst and former soldier Ralph Peters observed, "Increasingly, our national defense is a business and its business is not defense." But business has been good and, under George W. Bush, is likely to remain so. •

DOUGLAS W. PAYNE is a New York-based writer.

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# Ex-Convicts and Civil Death

**Ruth Rosen**

IMAGINE A corporate executive who's been convicted of embezzlement. He serves his sentence and some years later, having paid his debt to society, leaves prison a free man. Now he's an ex-convict, in fact, an ex-felon. Should we allow him to vote? Or has he forfeited his right to participate in American democracy?

Depending on where he lives, he may never vote again. Thirteen states bar ex-felons—permanently—from voting. Thirty-two states disenfranchise them while on parole, twenty-nine while on probation.

Few of us realize that ex-felons so commonly lose their right to vote. Nor are we aware that any felony can trigger what some have called "civil death." If, for example, a first-time offender pleads guilty to a single drug sale and is placed on probation, he or she can be permanently barred from voting. As Andrew Shapiro, an attorney, notes, "An eighteen-year-old first-time offender who trades a guilty plea for a non-prison sentence may unwittingly sacrifice forever his right to vote."

The people most affected by these laws, as you might suspect, are not corporate executives. They are disproportionately black men. Thirteen percent of African-American men—1.4 million people—are permanently disenfranchised because they are in prison, on parole or probation, or are ex-felons.

The impact of such widespread disenfranchisement on our elections is staggering. Florida, for example, denies the vote to ex-felons who have fully served their sentence. According to New York-based Human Rights Watch, Florida law prevented more than four hundred thousand ex-felons from voting in the November election. Among African-Americans, the impact was dramatic. Approximately one-third of Florida's black men—some two hundred thousand residents—were legally prohibited from casting a vote. Human Rights Watch concludes: "Assuming the voting pattern of black ex-felons would have been similar to the vote by black residents in Florida generally, the inability of these ex-offenders to vote had a significant impact on the number voting for Vice President Gore."

In other words, absent these disenfranchisement laws, Gore would now be president.

This nation began with a stingy view of who was virtuous enough to cast a vote in elections. In fact, the framers limited this right to free white men who owned property. But ever since, suffrage has been extended to those who were initially excluded: people without property, women, African-Americans, and people who are not literate.

The one group still excluded is convicted felons. In part, this is a legacy of the South's successful post-Reconstruction effort to prevent freed slaves from voting. Between 1890 and 1910, southern states crafted their criminal disenfranchisement laws, along with other voting qualifications, with the goal of preventing African-Americans from voting. In 1901, for example, Alabama lawmakers inserted a provision in the state constitution that disenfranchised any person guilty of the felonious crime of "moral turpitude." (In the South, that could mean just staring at a white woman.) Nor did the legislators even bother to hide their goal, which they openly declared was to establish and preserve white supremacy.

We are the heirs of that racist legacy. In most democratic countries, ex-felons are expected to re-enter society as citizens newly endowed with the rights and responsibilities they lost as legal outcasts. "These people have paid their debt to society," says Jamie Fellner, associate counsel at Human Rights Watch.


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"No other country in the world takes away the right to vote for life."

But in America, our legacy of slavery and Reconstruction still affects so many aspects of our democratic process—from the electoral college to poorly working voting machines in black districts. The bright side of Election 2000, however, is that it has ignited a spirited reconsideration of many of the arcane practices that shape our electoral process. So far, though, the issue of how many people are disenfranchised because of their criminal pasts has not been highly publicized.

I believe that an individual who is imprisoned for a felony *should* give up many civil rights, including that of suffrage. But afterward? If the point of imprisonment is rehabilitation, how can we conclude that people should suffer civil death after they have been released from prison? When a person has done time, he or she should be able to vote again, not after finishing parole, but upon leaving the prison grounds.

Because the disenfranchisement of ex-felons disproportionately affects African-American men, many of whom are in prison for drug felonies, many blacks are rightfully angry that disenfranchisement laws rob them of their participation in the voting process. "Fifty years after the beginnings of the civil rights movement, it is tragic that every day more black citizens lose their voting rights," says Marc Mauer, assistant director of the Washington D.C.-based Sentencing Project. "This is not just a criminal justice issue, but one of basic democracy."

Joe Loya, a disenfranchised ex-felon, expresses this sentiment even more eloquently: "Without a vote, a voice, I am a ghost inhabiting a citizen's space. I want to walk calmly into a polling place with other citizens, to carry my placid ballot into the booth, check off my choices, then drop my conscience in the common box."

Listen to his words. They just may be the battle cry for the next struggle for suffrage. ●

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# California's Deregulation Debacle

**Benjamin Ross**

THE CALIFORNIA power crisis has made it clear to all but the most theory-besotted ideologues that "trusting the market" does not automatically solve economic problems. This comes as news to few readers of *Dissent*, but what went wrong is worth a closer look. How something works is often easier to see when it breaks down than when it's running smoothly.

Before deregulation, electricity was produced and sold by local utility monopolies. To stop the utilities from gouging the consumer, prices were set by government agencies at levels that allowed them to recover their costs and earn a profit on invested capital. Politics, to be sure, intervened when this general formula was applied, and utilities deployed their considerable political influence in a quest for higher earnings.

As licensed monopolies, the utility companies were held responsible for generating enough electricity to meet all demand. Power plants and transmission lines take years to build, so planners had to look far into the future. The companies were happy to take on this job, because more investment meant greater profits. To the extent government oversaw the planning process at all, the regulators' task was more to prevent overspending on unneeded equipment than to ensure adequate supply.

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This system ran into problems in the 1970s. Projecting rapidly growing electricity use into the indefinite future, and facing skyrocketing costs for the oil that fueled many older generators, the utilities embarked on a vast program of investment in nuclear and coal-burning power plants. But in many parts of the country, these plants were hard to build. They were so large that the needed land, water, and transportation could only be brought together in a few places. Nuclear power came under attack, new air pollution rules made coal harder to burn, and NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) opposition sprang up in many localities. Where these constraints were most severe, the problem of power plant siting was turned over to new government commissions.

Fate intervened before the new siting agencies had to make hard decisions about whether to approve controversial plants in the face of local opposition. Electricity demand fell far short of predictions, while the price of oil dropped from its peaks. Some utilities faced financial crisis when revenues fell short and new nuclear plants cost far more than projected.

By the 1990s, the electric power industry had been coasting for years on the slack created by the overbuilding of the seventies. In sunbelt states, where demand had grown fastest, business had free rein, and it was still possible to build coal-fired power plants. Elsewhere, it was possible to get by with inexpensive and inoffensive natural gas turbines that operated only at times of greatest demand. Rapidly growing California was a special case; it relied on electricity imported from neighboring states where power plants were easier to build.

Although the public had forgotten the electricity crisis, it was still paying for expensive nuclear power plants built in the seventies. Here entered the promoters of privatization, and they were able to make a seemingly irresistible offer: open up the electricity business to competition, and we will save you money. The offer was premised on the low price of natural gas, which made it possible for new gas turbines to generate electricity at lower cost than existing nuclear and coal plants.

To get this scheme past state legislatures, a deal had to be cut between the new entrepreneurs and the existing utilities. This was easy to do. The utilities would split into two entities. Electricity distribution would remain a regulated monopoly; no one wanted to make vast investments to duplicate existing power lines. But the utilities' generating activities would shift into new subsidiaries whose profits would escape government controls. To make the promise of savings credible, retail prices were frozen for the first few years after deregulation laws went into effect. The utilities accepted this freeze in the belief that excess generating capacity left over from the regulated system would hold prices down for a while anyway, and in the expectation of greater profits later.

The promise that deregulation would lower prices in the long run was always a hoax. As the siting battles of the seventies showed, power plants do not spring out of the ground whenever the price of electricity exceeds its cost of production. Getting permission to build is a laborious and expensive process that requires open-handed spending on engineers, lawyers, and politicians. In a deregulated market where the costs of rejected proposals are not reimbursed, the risks that this process entails are worth taking only for handsome profits.

At best, the long-term functioning of a deregulated electricity market will resemble real estate development in fancy suburbs. The market sets prices that match supply with demand, but the balancing point bears no relation to the equilibrium described in economics textbooks. When rents on existing buildings yield only moderate profits, NIMBY opposition to development prevents new supply from entering the market. As growing scarcity raises prices, developers increase spending on political influence and become more willing to add expensive "amenities" to new construction to pacify neighbors. The value of new buildings rises far above the cost of land and construction, settling down only when the political clout engendered by excess profits reaches equilibrium with the votes and influence of the NIMBYs.

Every instinct of the business lobbyists, who are the core of George W. Bush's constitu-


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ency, favors the extension of this economic model to the power industry. Profits will be huge, and they will come only after the political wheels have been well greased. Thus the Bush administration's initial response to California's power problems: Refuse to control the price of electricity generated out of state and let California find its own balance between supply and demand. In addition, use the crisis as an excuse to advance long-sought, but only marginally relevant, goals of the lobbyists such as oil drilling in Alaska and relaxation of clean air standards.

WHETHER THIS approach can restore order to the power market is doubtful, even in the long run. Electricity has characteristics that will make it hard for market forces to attain the overpriced stability of suburban real estate. The entire system is connected into a single network that will crash unless generators are carefully synchronized. California's ostensibly free-market system therefore centralizes the moment-to-moment management of the grid in an entity called the Independent System Operator. Driven by technological imperatives, this body orders generating plants on and off, creating ever-changing opportunities for plant owners to manipulate the highly artificial auction mechanism that sets the prices.

The shortages in California are endemic to the deregulated power market. Electricity cannot, without great difficulty, be stored, and demand fluctuates from moment to moment. Regulated utilities, responsible for ensuring uninterrupted supply, maintained "peaking" plants that operated only during the few hours of greatest demand each year. The cost of a kilowatt-hour generated by these plants was enormous, but it was spread over all the other electricity and remained invisible to the consumer. In a competitive market, however, there is no reason to build peaking plants, and thus no way to ensure a continuous supply, unless the price of power rises to astronomical levels when demand peaks. This gives the rest of the producers, who have much lower costs, gigantic profits when the peaking plants run.

If prices are high for only a few moments, little harm is done. But predictions of future power requirements are unavoidably prone to error, and the number of hours that peaking plants will operate cannot be accurately foreseen. Here is where California has come to grief. Demand exceeded forecasts, and peaking plants were called into steady service. As more natural gas was burned in peaking plants, gas prices shot upward. Market electricity prices skyrocketed, sending utilities that had agreed to cap retail prices hurtling toward bankruptcy. At times, the state could not get enough power at any price.

However things finally get sorted out, the promise of savings for consumers will surely be broken. Defenders of deregulation admit this when they argue that the California experiment failed because it only went half-way and kept retail prices controlled. But if deregulation won't make power cheaper, what purpose can it have? Electricity is not like fine wine; it is all the same, and the consumer doesn't care whether it comes from the Napa Valley or the Finger Lakes. So competition can't improve the quality of the product. The market can't match planning for reliability of supply; and it will do its best to ignore environmental and social costs. The only possible reason to deregulate power is to save money.

Electricity has now joined airlines, telephones, and freight railroads in showing how deregulation of natural monopolies undercuts reliability. Deregulatory fervor, driven by ideology and the fat fees paid to lobbyists and investment bankers, is increasingly clashing with the need of the real economy for a dependable supply of essential services. How this conflict plays out in a business-dominated political environment will be fascinating to watch. ●

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# Cyber Subversion in the Information Economy

**Jackie Smith**

GLOBAL TRADE advocates hope that the new information technologies (ITs) will deliver immense benefits, especially for those who control these technologies. But as potent as they may be as profit-seeking tools, information technologies are (at least for the time being) equally effective as tools of political subversion. John Markoff, a historical sociologist at the University of Pittsburgh, makes the same point in reverse: "Just as literacy was as much an instrument of bureaucratic power as of social movement challenge, the new electronic technology seem[s] as likely to expand the toolkits of the powerful as to undermine them."* Few activists in recent protests would deny the importance of ITs to their work. Over the last decade especially, ITs have dramatically transformed possibilities for political organization and action in an increasingly global polity. But innovations in the subversive use of ITs bring strong responses from political and corporate elites seeking to control and exploit the commercial potential of these technologies.

"Our Resistance is as Transnational as Capital!" proclaimed a banner at protest headquarters in Prague during the September 2000 meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The multilingual assemblage of leaflet-bearing visitors and the computer terminals, cell phone-recharge outlets, and Internet hook-ups provided by the Initiative Against Economic Globalization (INPEG) helped substantiate this claim. In the weeks surrounding the September 26 (or "S26") protest against the world's financial institutions, Prague's ubiquitous Internet cafés hummed with activity as activists reported to their networks back home; sought updates on happenings in other parts of the movement, the city, and the world; or uploaded video and audio reports to activist Web sites. When police closed the main protester "Convergence Center" and banned public meetings, the Internet cafés proved beyond police control. The cafés facilitated efforts to mobilize large demonstrations to celebrate the early close of the World Bank/IMF meetings and demand humane treatment for imprisoned protesters.

The powerful use of ITs to disrupt the neoliberal economic agenda was first demonstrated by the 1998 campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). The MAI was developed in secret negotiations of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), where the absence of third world voices would help ensure that the treaty passed without substantial revisions. The MAI's purpose was to limit governments' ability to regulate foreign investment within their borders; activists labeled it a bill of rights for corporate investors. When the MAI negotiating text was leaked to movement leaders, they posted it on the Internet, quickly generating opposition from activists around the world. Within days of the first public scrutiny, the MAI—at least in its original form—was dead in the water. Other uses of cyber subversion resemble the anti-MAI campaign in their efforts to disrupt business as usual by opening the conference rooms of the World Trade Organization (WTO), World Bank, and IMF and making the substance of international economic negotiations visible to the global public. In short, ITs have created new avenues through which global activists can pursue a two-pronged strategy of disruption and transparency.

*John Markoff, "The Internet and Electronic Communications," in *Encyclopedia of American Cultural and Intellectual History*, eds. Mary Kupiec Cayton and Peter W. Williams (Scribner's, 2001).


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### Organizing in an Internet Age

Organizing is clearly changing as this new medium alters both the range of people who speak to one another and the form of their communication. Large numbers of small and informal networks can coordinate actions around shared goals, generating unpredictable outcomes for both organizers and authorities. Many delegates to the Prague World Bank/IMF meeting believed that there was little risk of protesters outnumbering and outmaneuvering the eleven thousand Czech police—which suggests the difficulties authorities have in planning for Internet-facilitated actions. Although much of this organizing takes place "in the open," unless the authorities understand the socially grounded networks of users visiting sites such as www.s26.org, they will have difficulty predicting the size, scope, and militancy of the people such sites reach. Internet organizing also complicates government efforts to repress the movement, as geographically dispersed victims of police abuse are able to file reports to a central database, where legal experts can compile evidence on behalf of free speech and civil rights claims.

In an article entitled "Does protest need a vision?" (*New Statesman*, July 3, 2000), Naomi Klein likens the movement's loose, fluid structure to that of the Internet itself, which she sees as producing a culture of "laissez-faire organizing." On the ground, this type of organizational structure helps explain at least one of the stark differences between the recent protests and earlier ones, namely the relatively high concentration of homemade placards, newly penned chants and street-theater scripts, and the use of "puppet-ganda" and costumes. Although the lyrics are similar, the melodies are wonderfully various. In contrast to the large protests typical of the 1970s and 1980s, there were very few mass-produced placards and borrowed slogans here. And those that did appear in Seattle on November 30, 1999, and in Washington, D.C., on April 16, 2000, were furnished by traditional social movement support structures: unions and churches—the latter being most involved with the "Jubilee 2000" campaign to cancel third world debt. Some of this creativity spilled over to the S26 protest in Prague, although it was more limited in scope and was matched by the more traditional protest templates brought by the stronger and more disciplined European socialist and communist parties and workers alliances. Local political and associational structures and cultures clearly mediate the influence of electronic media on the character of protests.

The new technologies, in short, help decentralize access to information—about political and legal processes, about policy critiques, and about resistance strategies and organization. This serves to reinforce the democratic, participatory norms that pervade much of the movement. It may also, however, deprive the movement of a unified voice and complicate sustained efforts to generate very large numbers of protesters at key events. My own view is that the overall impact of ITs will be beneficial: they will help expand information exchange and participation and create opportunities for decentralized protest by those who can't travel to the global sites where the conflict is staged.

### Electronic Monkey-Wrenching

ITs are providing the tools for activist networks that seek to disrupt corporate and governmental operations. Often making use of free E-mail and Web site platforms supported by the corporate advertising they seek to abolish, "hacktivists" of all skill levels employ this weapon of the (relatively) weak to further social change.

By far the most common use of electronic communications is to promote dialogue among activists about global problems and movement strategies and tactics. Broader geographic coalitions are possible where detailed minutes can be posted to dispersed organizers. Consensus positions can be negotiated via electronic listserves in order to make more efficient use of the limited meeting time transnational activists have. And a wide network of potential allies and supporters can be swiftly informed about collective actions.

Electronic organizing has shaped a new form of protest—localized solidarity actions under the rubric of "Global Days of Action." Global Days of Action can cause major disruptions in numerous cities around the world with very little in the way of centralized, visible organi-

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zational structures. What activists describe as a "carnival against capital" is actually a flowering of locally planned initiatives that parallel a mass mobilization at a particular meeting site. Thus activists commonly claim, "We are everywhere and nowhere." The Internet has not only helped popularize these global days, but has also increased their potency. Local groups are encouraged to post reports of their actions to movement Web sites, where they help amplify the perceived success of each day. Individually, most of these actions look small and ineffective; they may involve as few as a dozen people. However, when included among lists of protests in scores of cities and dozens of countries, they reinforce the empowering notion that participants are part of a global movement.

While many groups mark Global Days of Action with disruptions of local financial districts, other activists are inspired to engage in the electronic equivalent of guerrilla warfare— disrupting the routines of political and capitalist elites by creating simple nuisances, such as E-mail or fax jams that generate masses of fax or E-mail messages to targets, disrupting business as usual. Or this new kind of direct action might involve the creation of fake Web sites designed to lure visitors from official sites and expose them to alternative messages about a company or international organization. Recent examples of these are posted at www.gatt.org, www.whirledbank.org, or www.olympisc.com. Web "sit-ins" are also common as a way to block access to a target's site. A group called The Electronic Disturbance Theatre launched a blockade of the Mexican Embassy's Web site to show solidarity with the Zapatista struggle. Eighteen thousand people from forty-nine countries joined that effort. Earlier this year, Nike's Web site was taken over by protesters who encouraged would-be Nike customers to join protests against the World Economic Forum meeting in Melbourne. Activists disrupted Internet sales by the company, a corporate participant in the World Economic Forum, for seven hours as corporate officials and authorities wrung their hands over the difficulty of proving the guilt of suspected offenders. This activity also makes governments nervous.

Less confrontational but only somewhat less influential are such actions as electronic petitions, action alerts, and dissemination of resources or articles about the movement and its targets. Following the arrests of protesters in Seattle, Washington, D.C., and Prague, activist networks generated petitions pressing for fair treatment and release of political prisoners. Although the ultimate impact of such petitions is difficult to assess, it's fair to say that local police chiefs are unaccustomed to having international attention focused on their internal operations. If they are not inclined to pay heed to such petitions, they may find that their superiors take them more seriously. The use of action alerts is not new, but it is greatly assisted by electronic communications. Unlike mail-based campaigns, the timing of actions can be immediate. When the *New York Times* falsely claimed that Seattle protesters used Molotov cocktails and lobbed excrement at delegates, activists' responses led to a retraction within two days.

By facilitating the spread of information that challenges dominant ideologies and portrayals of reality, ITs facilitate global efforts to mobilize resistance and disrupt official agendas. Activists dramatized the potential of this strategic use of technology through the innovation of Independent Media Centers (IMCs), designed to "bypass the corporate media machine" by creating opportunities for activists themselves to report about the movement (www.indymedia.org). Introduced at the Seattle protests, IMCs are press centers established at the site of a mass protest or in cities with active movement groups. They provide ongoing critical commentary on local and global events and facilitate decentralized, independent coverage of protest activities. Activists volunteer to write, film, or take photos relevant to the protests; they receive an IMC press pass and can publish their materials on the IMC Web site. IMC meetings help ensure that different aspects of the protests are covered by the loosely knit team of reporters and videographers. Films made by IMC activists in Seattle and Prague have been used in part to substantiate protesters' claims of police abuses and use of agents provocateurs.


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### The "Great Equalizer"?

Can the new technologies effectively challenge global inequalities or do they simply reproduce them? World Bank officials are especially quick to emphasize the importance of their institution in bringing the new technologies to third world countries so that they can compete in a global economy. Will resistance to the Bank prevent poor countries' and people's access to ITs? To what extent does Internet-based activism marginalize the poorest of the world while privileging activists with greater access to the hardware and skills it requires? "The revolution will not be e-mailed," say Peoples Global Action affiliates, who prefer to maintain traditional organizing techniques of hard-copy leaflets and mailings and who argue that electronic technologies must be used alongside "more involving and humanizing activities." Can ITs serve as the great equalizer for either the global economic playing field or for the movement arising in opposition to it?

Although we lack systematic evidence on which to base an answer to these questions, we do have some data reflecting differences in activists' access to the Internet. A 1996 survey of transnational human rights organizations, for instance, showed that 44 percent of all groups used electronic communications. In a survey taken just two years later of the affiliates of a transnational organization called EarthAction, 59 percent reported having access to electronic communications. Direct comparisons of the different types of organizations in these surveys is problematic, but the higher percentage of use by groups that we would expect to be *less* likely to use electronic communications suggests the spread of the new technologies among activist groups.

As the use of electronic communications grows, the digital divide between the global North and South also appears to be growing; northern activists have acquired the technology at higher rates than their southern counterparts. In the 1996 survey of transnational groups, 49 percent of northern and 30 percent of southern organizations reported access to electronic communications. In the 1998 EarthAction survey, 80 percent of northern and 51 percent of southern affiliates reported use of the Internet or electronic mail. African affiliates reported the least access to the new technologies (35 percent), while Latin American affiliates rivaled the rates of access found in North America and Western Europe (75 percent). The digital disparity was greater for access to the Internet than to E-mail—probably because of variation in the quality and density of telephone connections.

Despite this divide, some argue that the Internet has been essential for the world's poorest. Roberto Bissio, one of the people responsible for advancing electronic communications in third world activism, claims, "Contrary to 'common sense' belief, the spread of electronic mail and conferences in the NGO [nongovernmental organization] communities and the international institutions they deal with was the result of pressure from the South to the North and not the other way around."* Bissio stresses that the decline in costs of long-distance communications brought the greatest benefits to those farthest from the places where policy is decided. Southern NGOs are less in need of information than of channels for relaying information to appropriate forums. The expansion of communications technologies has enabled more local and national groups in the global South to demand *direct* access to global political forums in place of a system involving mostly northern-based international NGO intermediaries.

### Elite Responses

Governments and corporations have begun in earnest to mimic the techniques that activists have refined. In the case of the global financial institutions, they have done so in part to cultivate popular legitimacy for their organizations, which they see as gravely misunderstood by the general public. Both the WTO and the World Bank initiated the equivalent of electronic global town halls, where the public was encouraged to post questions and comments on the organizations' Web sites.

But there are clear limits to how far global

*Roberto Bissio, "Occupying New Space for Public Life: Politics and People in a Network Society," in *Whose World is it Anyway? Civil Society, the United Nations, and the Multilateral Future,* eds. John W. Foster and Anita Anand (Ottawa: The United Nations Association, 1999).

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financial elites are willing to go. Following the failed Seattle meeting, for instance, the WTO Web site was transformed virtually overnight into a more user-friendly site, boasting of the organization's newly found commitment to "transparency." But just a few months later, one could not find a single reference to the Seattle meeting on the site, even amid histories of the WTO that mentioned other meetings. Also, World Bank president James Wolfensohn sought to preempt growing attacks on his organization after Seattle by meeting with Microsoft chief Bill Gates to plan a sixty million dollar "Gateway Initiative" that would establish a World Bank site as "the premier Web entry point for information about poverty and sustainable development." While facilitating access to information, the Gateway Initiative would have the added (and not-unintended) benefit of giving the bank centralized control of the flow of information to and from governments, NGOs, and corporations. Of course, activists have launched critiques of Gateway (see www.brettonwoodsproject.org and, for the official take, www.worldbank.org/gateway).

As the world's financial elites regroup following a tumultuous year, they will likely adjourn their meetings to places less open to the disruptive protests of Seattle, Washington, D.C., Melbourne, Prague, and elsewhere. For instance, the site of the next WTO ministerial meeting is Qatar, an authoritarian Middle Eastern kingdom with a poor human rights record and a weak civil society sector. There is talk within the World Bank of abandoning the annual conference in order to avoid public contestation. Should protesters' calls for greater transparency in the world's financial institutions be stonewalled, I suspect we will see new innovations in the use of electronic communications to illuminate proceedings that authorities would prefer to conduct in the dark.

The global communications revolution may be driving the current phase of global economic expansion, but it also carries with it new prospects for resistance. Elites seek to advance information technology for greater profits, but these same technologies have supported new forms of transnational organizing and action that form the basis of an emergent international civil society. The great engine of the new global economy, like the newspapers of an earlier era, supports both the expansion of markets and the rise of citizens' networks organized to change economic and social realities. Elites nevertheless still hope to promote their economic model with institutions that cannot endure transparency and democratic decision making. This ongoing dialectic between cyber subversion and the growing concentration of power will shape the politics of the new millennium. ●

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## To Our Contributors

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(1) Be sure to keep a copy of your manuscript. And please remember that we can't consider articles unless they're accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

(2) Please don't write to ask whether we're interested in such and such an article—it makes for useless correspondence. Look at our last few issues to see if your idea fits in. Or take a chance and send us your article. We will not consider manuscripts submitted simultaneously to several publications.

(3) Type your ms *double-spaced*, with *wide* margins. Check all your figures, dates, names, etc.—they're the author's responsibility. Please use inclusive language so that we don't have to make adjustments during editing. If you are submitting to *Dissent* electronically, our e-mail address is editors@dissentmagazine.org.

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THE EDITORS


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# Militarism and Globalism

**Alice H. Amsden and Takashi Hikino**

COLIN POWELL, George W. Bush's bedazzling secretary of state, emphasized the importance in his Senate confirmation hearings of tightening ties between trade and national security. There is a need, he asserted, for better coordination of American foreign economic and military policies. What, concretely, does Powell mean?

Consider the entanglement of global economic and political power characteristic of Britain's early rise:

> For more than a century, when the British economy was on its way to maturity as the workshop of the world, its governments were not particularly liberal nor wedded ideologically to laissez-faire. Like the proverbial hedgehog of Aeschalus, the Hanoverian Governments [1688-1815] knew some big things, namely that security, trade, Empire and military power really mattered. In fruitful (if uneasy) partnership with bourgeois merchants and industrialists they poured millions into strategic objectives which we can see (with hindsight) formed preconditions for the market economy and night-watchman state of Victorian England, as well as the British world order which flourished under British hegemony from 1846 to 1914. *By that time men of the pen, especially the pens of the political economy, had forgotten, and did not wish to be reminded, what the first industrial nation owed to men of the sword.* (Emphasis added)*

The United States, too, recognized that security, trade, empire, and military power really mattered. Washington used politics, in the form of gunboats and colonial annexation (in the Philippines and Cuba, for example) to further American economic goals.

The Vietnam War, however, was possibly a turning point in the crude relationship between political intervention and economic gain. Even the coldest warrior could find no economic rationale for fighting in Vietnam, which had few raw materials and was of little use to American investors or traders. When the business community's support for the war waned, antiwar activism carried the day, and one of the costliest U.S. military exploits ended in failure.

Since then, the mixture of security, trade, empire, and military power has become less holistic. Economic threats to the United States have largely been countered by economic reprisals; and political threats, real or imagined, have brought political responses, including the use of overt or covert force. Whereas gunboat diplomacy was used to pry open markets in the past, Japan's elusive markets in the 1980s did not suggest the usefulness of another A-bomb attack; we even pressured Japan to increase its own military spending so as to relieve the American defense "burden." When American banks wanted to operate in Korea, the United States forced open Korea's markets (and precipitated the Asian financial crisis) using economic rather than political arm-twisting. Fighting fire with fire, political destabilization and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans were countered by (reluctant) political intervention. Left-wing insurgency in Latin America's weakest economies is typically greeted with CIA-type political "counter-insurgency" maneuvers. The United States operates behind the scenes in Congo, but overt intervention is relatively minor because the political threat is minor, despite Congo's rich raw materials. The entanglement between economics and politics has been greatest where oil is present, as in the Middle East. Yet the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become so deep, intractable, and politically explosive that huge American military spending in the region now transcends the issue of oil. The "rogue state" of Saddam Hussein triggered a massive show of force, with oil firmly

*E. Silbner, *The Problems of War in Nineteenth Century Economic Thought* (Princeton University Press, 1972).

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in Washington's mind. But when Iraq withdrew to its original borders, the United States switched tactics from military intervention to economic sanctions.

The murkiest relationship between politics and economics characterizes the U.S. reaction to foreign economic competition in the U.S. domestic market. Foreign competition elicits what appears to be a political response, but really is an economic defense in disguise. Thus, when U.S. industry is threatened by low-wage exports from undemocratic developing countries, demands are voiced for making such countries' access to the U.S. market contingent on their introduction of human rights, labor standards, and democratic freedoms. In practice, such demands often amount to economic protectionism. Economic threats are really being dealt with by economic tactics.

So what, after all, does Colin Powell have in mind when he calls for a still stronger connection between trade policy and defense policy? He shows his hand when he is sizing up China: "A strategic partner China is not, but neither is China our inevitable and implacable foe. China is a competitor, a potential regional rival, but also a trading partner willing to cooperate in areas where our strategic interests overlap." The Great Warrior seems to be saying that because China is a big deal for U.S. exporters and investors, let us not mobilize our military might against it unnecessarily.

The new secretary of state can be interpreted as being the most economically rational of imperialists: Don't go to war unless it is an absolute political necessity or makes good economic sense. If it doesn't pay, then don't do it. Military intervention, after all, is costly, and if there are alternative energy sources to oil, if synthetics can replace Congo's raw materials, then keep the gunboats at home. What is most important is to win the trade wars and finesse the shooting wars.

There is both good news and bad news in Powell's philosophy. The good news is that by according trade top priority, the United States may be less trigger-happy than one might expect with a retired five-star general as secretary of state. The bad news is that the relationship between politics and military force will probably remain unchanged from the days of George Bush the Elder. A U.S. missile build-up appears likely—the knee-jerk military version of making the world safe for free trade. The United States can be expected to remain a reluctant enforcer of human rights and an enthusiastic enforcer of anti-left insurgency movements. Even if a shooting war that involves the United States directly is no longer regarded as good for American business, a shooting war that involves other economically backward countries is still very good business for American, British, French, Russian, Israeli, and Chinese armaments manufacturers. If child labor in developing countries draws demands for labor standards, child soldiers in developing countries ought to draw vociferous demands for comprehensive monitoring and regulation of the arms trade. But they won't.

Colin Powell's vision—of trade leading the flag—is based on the premise that the United States is the global political and economic hegemon. In general, for a country to wield world hegemonic power, it must fulfill four conditions: (1) it must be a strong military power to broker world security; (2) it must enjoy a dominant technological and economic position to pay for its military might; (3) it must have sustained current account surpluses to support the expansion of foreign aid and investment; and (4) it must have a stable key currency to ensure international financial stability.

If all four conditions are not met, then imperfect hegemony exists. Consequently, a strong possibility also exists for global instability. The United States today meets only three of these four conditions. Rather than a sustained current account surplus, it has been running a large and growing current account deficit due to its excess of imports over exports. As the U.S. economy slows, other countries may withdraw their money from American markets, wreaking financial havoc, weakening American industry, and thus compromising points two and four above. It may become more difficult than Colin Powell imagines for the United States to win the trade wars to which he sensibly accords primary importance. ●

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# Faint Hopes in the Balkans

**Bogdan Denitch**

Policy makers in Washington need good news in the Balkans, but have never been willing to lay out the resources necessary to make things turn out well. Instead, they have searched for good guys, effective leaders who might bring good news on the cheap. First they embraced the Bosnian Muslim leader Alia Izetbegovic; then moved on to the ultra-rightist Croatian nationalist Franjo Tudjman; then to Slobodan Milosevic (the "indispensable" person for the Dayton agreement); then to the Kosovar Albanian "freedom fighter" Hashim Thacqi (a favorite of Madeleine Albright); then to the president of that smugglers' paradise Montenegro; and most recently to the new president of Serbia, Vojislav Kostunica, an Orthodox Christian believer who is a conservative legalist and a "moderate" nationalist. Kostunica won last year's election, but the results were contested by Milosevic and his regime and had to be enforced by an impressive mass mobilization of students, coal miners, and small-town industrial workers. It was these groups, not the moderate and liberal opposition parties the West backed (but always in a miserly way) that stormed the parliament and television headquarters and disarmed the police. The best of the opposition parties did participate: the two social democratic parties (Social Democratic Union and the League of Social Democrats in Vojvodina) and the Civic Alliance were in the forefront of the demonstration, but the mass of demonstrators were people who had never participated in politics before—the youth of OTPOR (Resistance) and the blue-collar tough guys, the metal workers of Kragujevac and the hard-rock coal miners, who served as the shock troops of the anti-Milosevic coalition. It was their grim faces that convinced the police to lay down their arms.

In a second election, on December 23, the Serbs overwhelmingly supported a heterogeneous anti-Milosevic grouping of mostly small parties, giving it two thirds of the Serbian legislature. But before we cheer too loudly—and we should certainly cheer, because the defeat of Milosevic's kleptocratic and authoritarian regime is an indispensable step toward democratic reform—we should note that our natural allies on the scene, the folk who drove Milosevic out of office, are restrained in their joy. These actors—the students and workers, OTPOR and the independent trade unions—are cautious for several reasons. For one, they were not overjoyed when a major figure in the new regime, the mayor of Belgrade, stated that the three bases of the regime are anticommunism, Orthodox religion, and monarchism—and was then rewarded by being appointed ambassador to the United States.

The Orthodox base is clear enough, although more than 25 percent of the population is non-Orthodox, and many of the Orthodox are nonbelievers. There is a major offensive by this most tribalist of Christian churches to consolidate its place in public life. Not only is religion being introduced into all the schools, but one of the first state visits of the new president, in the company of the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox church, was to Moscow to visit President Vladimir Putin and the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox church. His next important visit was to the Serbian monastery on Mount Athos (in Greece), where he was accompanied by a large entourage of post-Milosevic "democrats."

The new regime is moving at a snail's pace to deliver its war criminals to the international court in the Hague; nor is it in any hurry to punish war crimes committed by Serbian military and paramilitary units in the long and bitter war

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of Yugoslav succession in Serbian courts. At best they will try Milosevic's gang at home for crimes in Serbia, but won't send them to the Hague to be tried. Unless they deal with the killers at home, the Serbs cannot begin to clear their public life of the accumulated cultural and political debris left by a decade and a half of chauvinist nationalism and Mafia-like corruption. So far, the post-Milosevic democrats and their allies in Serbia are following the bad example of the post-Tudjman Croat democrats in refusing to start an indispensable housecleaning. That means that notorious killers remain free, waiting for a comeback. And a national-populist comeback is, alas, not out of the question. Both post-authoritarian regimes (in Croatia and Serbia) inherited devastated and looted economies at a time when there was little likelihood of generous aid for reconstruction. The advent of the second Bush administration reduces the odds on any sort of help.

How one can rebuild democratic institutions (or, more accurately, build them from ground zero) given unemployment figures of 26 percent (Croatia) or 40 percent (Serbia) and no immediate prospect of economic improvement is a mystery, would be a mystery even to solid governments of the democratic left. Serbia and Croatia now have coalitions in which neoliberalism is the dominant ideology despite the presence of social democrats. That is why most experts predict stormy weather, which will be made even more dangerous by the wrong-headed mantra of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund: privatize and marketize. That policy has already devastated the schools, medical system, and economy of Croatia. Serbia is even more vulnerable.

The prospects for stable democracy are grim—even if the crisis in relations with the reluctant junior partner of the Yugoslav federation, Montenegro, were to be settled in a peaceful way; even if the Albanians in southern Serbia can be persuaded to stop their constant military provocations; and even if Serb nationalists can be kept from disrupting Bosnia-Herzegovina. It is already clear that Albanian violence in southern Serbia will be used to postpone any attempts to confront Serbia's nationalist demons. The fact that similar violence in the Basque Country and Northern Ireland has not been dealt with quickly or "cleanly" by far more prosperous and sophisticated countries cannot even be mentioned in the present overheated political world of post-Milosevic Yugoslavia. Instead, the Albanian attacks are treated as an urgent and solvable problem, which pushes everything else off the political agenda.

What comes next is unclear. But it seems certain that the standard U.S.-West European formula won't work: it isn't going to be possible for a moderate liberal regime to introduce market capitalism into the devastated economy and society of Serbia. The more relentless the introduction, the more relentless the failure. Radical democratic and egalitarian programs are called for, and we don't yet know whether the social forces exist to sustain them. Except for some promising but small social democratic parties in Serbia, Montenegro, and Vojvodina, the main actors will have to be the independent trade unions, the students, a few courageous journalists, and (maybe) the new nongovernmental organizations. ●

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# Big Fox, Little Village

**Forrest D. Colburn**

Much ink has been spilled proclaiming the recent Mexican presidential elections epochal, monumental, even revolutionary. The election of Vicente Fox, the candidate of the National Action Party (PAN), ended seventy-one years of rule by the Institutionalized Revolutionary Party (PRI). No political party in the world had been in continuous power for so long. A façade of democracy scarcely masked its authoritarian rule. Still, until 1982, rapid if uneven economic growth and the adroitness of the PRI leadership bought political acquiescence. But the economic crisis of 1982 emboldened the media and the nascent political opposition. Media revelations of corruption at the highest levels of the PRI led to public outcry and further strengthened the opposition. Growing opposition strength encouraged even more investigative journalism. Opposition parties increasingly won municipal, state, and congressional elections, but in a country where *el señor presidente* is the dominant political force, the PRI held on during presidential elections. Many assumed that it would never surrender the presidency—and therefore assumed, too, that Mexico would never change.

The elections of July 2, 2000, brought a surprise. The PRI candidate lost. The winner was Vicente Fox, a six-foot-five-inch, cowboy-booted former executive of Coca-Cola, who stomped a plastic dinosaur during campaign appearances. Fox promised sweeping changes, "a new political future"—not a change of government, he said, but a regime change. The new regime is to be transparent, accountable, and responsive—"the new reality of power in Mexico." Moreover, this profound "reform of the state, breaking paradigms," will enable the Mexican government finally to tackle Mexico's pressing problems of poverty, inequality, unemployment, ethnic discrimination, and environmental degradation.

In the small village of Taxco Viejo in the western state of Guerrero, however, Fox is ignored. No hope—or even interest—is vested in him. The two thousand residents won't even give him a chance to deliver on his promises. Taxco Viejo is a Mexican "backwater," far from the presidential palace. But most of Mexico, including many neighborhoods of Mexico City, is also a political backwater. Although it is risky to generalize from what Mexicans in one small village have to say, the conclusions of the residents of Taxco Viejo are haunting.

Taxco Viejo lies just off the national highway linking Cuernavaca to Acapulco. It is close to the city of Taxco. The land is rugged; the climate is dry. The village is spread out over a loose web of streets paved with irregular stones. The picturesque church, set on a hill, dates back some three hundred years and serves as the center of the village. There are a few small groceries and other stores selling one thing or another, as well as the Estetico Unisex "Dani" beauty salon. There are some announcements for concerts in neighboring Iguala (Priscila and her Silver Bullets), as well as ads for Pepsi and Corona. There are Chevrolet trucks and Volkswagen beetles, and there are horses and burros. But mostly, there are just houses built of cement blocks and the families who inhabit them.

There is a school, electricity, and potable water. Everyone is decently clothed and appears to have enough to eat. But, according to residents, life is hard. Work is scarce, and what work exists is poorly paid. A six-day workweek will earn a man three hundred pesos, equivalent to thirty dollars. Women are commonly paid less. Yet prices for the basic necessities do not differ much from those in the United

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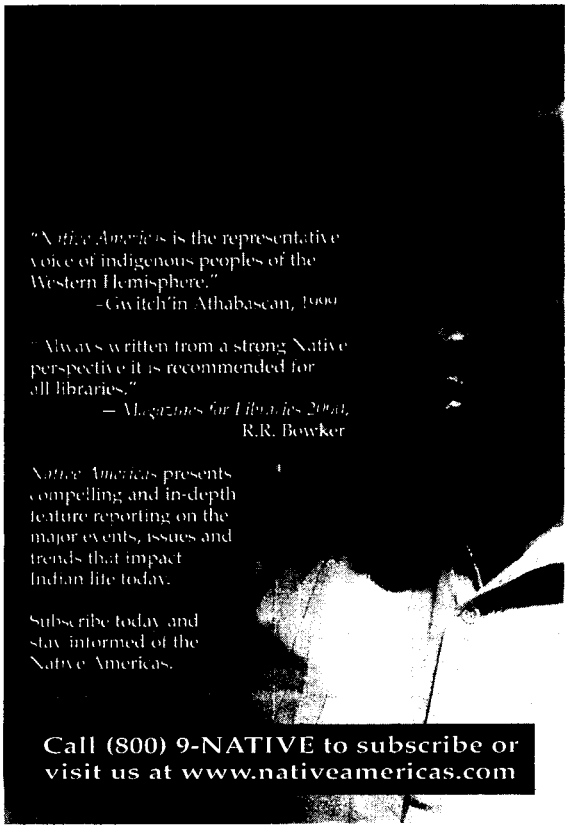
States. So those who find work do little more than feed themselves with a simple diet and clothe themselves with secondhand clothes imported from the United States.

There is some work in agriculture, but it is seasonal. Arable land is scarce, as is water for irrigation. Scattered everywhere are small fields of corn, grown with the most rudimentary technology. Some vegetables are grown, too, but the agricultural sector is severely constrained in the employment and income it can offer. Artisans produce inexpensive jewelry sold in Taxco, Mexico City, and border towns frequented by tourists, but the income generated by this work is also limited.

The Mexican state is nowhere to be seen. It does not have a presence in the depressed agriculture sector, nor does it do anything to stimulate artisan activity or provide alternative sources of employment and income. Residents of Taxco Viejo rightly feel that in their all-consuming struggle for employment and income, they have to fend for themselves. The government is so removed from their lives that who controls the machinery of state is irrelevant.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No "development strategy" has yet reached Taxco Viejo. "Import substitution" through the promotion and protection of Mexican industry has had no impact on Taxco Viejo. The North American Free Trade Agreement has had no effect here. The ideas Fox has revealed to date about promoting broad-based economic development seem very distant from the residents' prosaic struggle for a livelihood. Moreover, in his first few months in office, Fox has been swamped by the need to mediate bickering among the political elite of Mexico (including pipe-smoking, bandolier-wearing *subcomandante* Marcos in Chiapas). The residents of Taxco Viejo believe that there is nothing that the Mexican government can—or will—do to improve their welfare. They are forsaken; cynicism is rife.

Where is their salvation? It lies in migration, abandoning Mexico altogether, crossing the border to live and work in the United States. In fact, much of the labor force of Taxco Viejo is in Chicago. Eliut, for example, is the youngest of seven siblings and the only one left in Taxco Viejo. Her three brothers and two sisters are in Chicago, a fourth brother is in Mexico City. She, too, wanted to go to Chicago, but someone had to take care of their mother. Two of her brothers returned briefly to Taxco Viejo when their father died, and Eliut reports that they were uncomfortable, complaining of the dust and the poor sanitation of the village. But it is her brothers and sisters abroad who maintain what is left of the family in Taxco Viejo. And so it is elsewhere in the village. Alicia is one of five siblings. Although she and others in the family work in town, it is her two brothers in Chicago who provide the decisive financial support. Alicia did not bother to vote in the election. How could the outcome possibly affect her?

The stories of Alicia, Eliut, and others in Taxco Viejo underscore just how important (illegal) migration to the United States is for the poor communities of Mexico. People with resources can benefit or suffer from changes in state economic policy, but the poor remain unaffected. It is rational to conclude in places like Taxco Viejo that who runs the government and


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what they do while running it are equally meaningless. Migration *is* the development strategy of the poor in Mexico. Not surprisingly, residents of Taxco Viejo take a keen interest in how to get to the border, how to cross it (no one has the money to get a passport and a visa to travel legally to the United States), and how to link up with relatives or friends in Chicago.

Migration may be the economic salvation of Taxco Viejo, but it comes at a high cost. The physical hardships of the trip north and of working in Chicago are accepted. It is the emotional difficulties—the pain of family separation, the anxiety and loneliness—that are heartbreaking. Sometimes the decision to migrate is not made freely. Parents tell sons that they must go. Other times, daughters wish to go, but, like Eliut, are told they must stay. These issues—along with the rain for the meager fields of corn—are what concern the people of Taxco Viejo.

They expect very little from the government; no one in Taxco Viejo speaks well of it. Tomás, an elderly man born during the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920, echoed a common sentiment: "Mexico is rich: it is a large country with so many resources, including petroleum, and we Mexicans work hard. We are poor because we have been badly governed." Tomás and others are indignant about widespread corruption that runs from lowly police officers to past presidents (the truth about a president in Mexico is never known until he leaves office). Many villagers are quick to lump all politicians together, claiming that they are indistinguishable from one another, dismissing them as *ladrones* (thieves). Isn't Fox from the same economic elite that has always governed the country? How different could he be? Others say that while he may be "pure" and well-meaning, he is one individual in a country of a hundred million, and how much can one individual do, especially when he is dependent on a political caste that has so many ties to the authoritarian, corrupt practices of the past?

The residents of Taxco Viejo are difficult partners in the construction and maintenance of a multiparty democracy. Ending the rule of the PRI, with its corrupt fusion of party and state, has to be positive; it will open opportunities for democratic dialogue and compromise. By breaking the hegemony of the PRI, Vicente Fox, cowboy boots and all, is leading Mexico into the messy and uncertain politics of competitive democracy. In Taxco Viejo, however, there is little interest in the difficulties—even dangers—that he and his colleagues face. The weight of history and poverty is heavy here. And the only salvation—migration to the United States—not only has nothing to do with the state, but means abandoning Mexico altogether. Where will the hope of the new regime and the fatalism of Taxco Viejo meet? ●

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FORREST D. COLBURN is the author of *Latin America at the End of Politics*, forthcoming from Princeton University Press.

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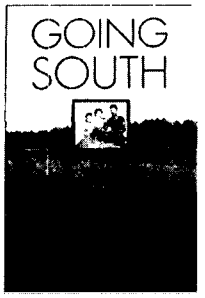

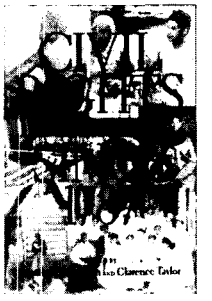

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# The Road (Not?) Taken

*Anthony Giddens, the Third Way, and the Future of Social Democracy*

**Jeffrey C. Isaac**

THE "THIRD WAY" is the subject of countless articles, op-ed columns, policy papers, international conferences, and the public pronouncements by heads of state from Bill Clinton to Gerhard Schroeder to Tony Blair. Anthony Giddens is clearly the most visible and important social theorist today to develop and defend this idea of a third way. Both his notoriety and the extraordinary hostility he is capable of inspiring are due to the specific role he has carved out for himself as a British public intellectual in the age of New Labour. For, beyond his writing, Giddens is also the founder and editor of Polity Press, an important publisher of social theory; the director of the London School of Economics; and a member of Tony Blair's inner circle of advisers. In these roles he has worked with indefatigable energy to promote his ideas. His efforts have not gone unrewarded. He has received encomiums from the likes of Blair, Romano Prodi, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso. He has also been sharply criticized by many on the left for what they see as a capitulation to the political status quo. For these critics the so-called third way is simply neoliberalism with a human face, all dressed up in a language of "post-ideological politics" that well suits New Age, sound-bite culture.[1] They see Giddens as a rationalizer at best, an apologist at worst, for such a humanized neoliberalism.

I am skeptical of this criticism, not because I believe that the third way represents the riddle of history solved or because I believe that Giddens's particular formulations are beyond reproach, but because I am doubtful of the supposedly more authentic left or social democratic alternatives that many of the critics take for granted. In short, while I am inclined to believe that the third way *is* neoliberalism with a human face, I doubt that it is *simply* this and, moreover, I wonder whether there is any reason to expect from contemporary politics anything more than this. I am thus wary of the harsh denunciations of Giddens for saying what many on the left privately acknowledge—that the political terrain has irremediably shifted in ways that have weakened the "historical project" of the left. But I am also wary of Giddens himself, for he seems in the name of modernization to have embraced developments that ought not to be embraced and to attribute to the new dispensation unrealistic possibilities for human advancement.

In my analysis of Giddens's project, I want to make three basic points. First, his third way is the product not of political myopia or opportunism, but of a serious and in some ways exemplary intellectual trajectory. Second, Giddens's argument about the third way—as distinct from various slogans and position papers produced by party ideologists and policy wonks—is a plausible account of democratic left politics, not reducible to the policy rationalizations regularly peddled by Blair and Clinton propagandists. And third, this argument is deeply flawed: it is insufficiently attentive to questions of power and insufficiently critical of what a politics of "the center" is capable of achieving. Although Giddens in my view rightly discerns the limits of a more ambitious left politics, he fails to acknowledge the limits of what has replaced such a politics.

## Giddens as Social Theorist

Before becoming an academic adviser to the political stars, Giddens was well known as a prolific and eclectic social theorist. His 1971 *Capitalism and Social Theory* was one of the first major works in Anglo-American social science to go beyond the formalism of Parsonian



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sociology to construct a fruitful conversation among the three "founders" of "classical sociology"—Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber. This synthetic effort highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of Marx's class analysis, Durkheim's analysis of social symbols and religious forms, and Weber's account of rationalization and bureaucracy. What emerged was a view of sociology centered on the complex relations between capitalism and modernity. These themes were developed, in a more empirical vein, in Giddens's 1973 *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies*. That book—like the work then being generated by neo-Marxists such as Nicos Poulantzas and Erik Olin Wright—argued that the class relations of post-industrial capitalist societies were more complex than classical Marxism envisaged. Giddens underscored the interconnections and disparities between what Weber called class, status, and party. In these early works Giddens asked big questions, from a vantage point on the left, broadly construed.

In subsequent works, Giddens expanded on these themes. In a series of books—*New Rules of Sociological Method*, *Studies in Social and Political Theory*, and *Central Problems of Social Theory*—he developed what came to be known as the "theory of structuration." Drawing from Claude Levi-Strauss, Louis Althusser, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jürgen Habermas, and Michel Foucault, Giddens criticized scientistic perspectives—whether behavioralist or Marxist—and "interpretive" approaches, in the name of a distinctive conception of critical theory. His central insight was that social life consists of numerous "social structures" that are both the conditions of and the (typically unintended) outcome of ordinary social interaction. These structures exert a causal power on the conduct of social agents, something typically obscured by interpretivists; and yet they are also sustained or altered by such conduct, having no independent reality apart from their social production and reproduction. Giddens's formulations are often prolix, and there are lacunae in his account. But he sought with considerable success to develop a view of society consistent with the reality of power and the possibility of conscious social change. And implicit in this account was a view of sociological reason as a critical faculty. The parallels with Habermas are obvious, though Giddens's work has always lacked Habermas's philosophical ambition.

On the basis of the theory of structuration, Giddens proceeded to develop an even more ambitious account of the evolution of modern society, articulated in a critical dialogue with Marxism. In *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (1981), he argued against the most sophisticated efforts to reconstruct historical materialism, criticizing Marxism as a reductionist theory of society, and seeking to incorporate Marxian insights within a more pluralistic view of the sources of social division. Then, in *The Nation-State and Violence* (1987), Giddens went further, focusing on the problems of power and violence in twentieth-century political life. His concluding chapter identified violence and dangers to ecology as the principal challenges confronting critical theory today. And in *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990), Giddens argued that modernity is distinguished not simply by the development of industrialism, capitalism, and bureaucracy, but, at a deeper level, by the chronic reflexivity of knowledge, the development of increasingly abstract social relationships, and the ceaseless and global transformation of society and nature.

Risk and danger are associated with modernity, according to Giddens, but there is also the promise of freedom and prosperity. Contending that programs of change ought to be grounded in an understanding of existing possibilities, he insisted that "we must keep to the Marxian principle that avenues for desired social change will have little practical impact if they are not connected to institutionally immanent possibilities." But Giddens located such possibilities less in the working class than in "new social movements" associated with peace, democracy, feminism, and ecology. *Consequences* offered little by way of programmatic politics, but it broached themes that would soon become central to Giddens's program: reflexivity, risk, and the unintended consequences of social engineering. Modern history, Giddens held (echoing Walter Benjamin), is like a "juggernaut," propelled by the unintended conse-


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quences of human empowerment; yet, while we cannot "seize hold" of this juggernaut, we can perhaps "steer" it in beneficial directions.

In developing these themes Giddens's writing came increasingly under the influence of Ulrich Beck, the German social theorist whose book *The Risk Society* treated ecological danger as the paradigm of a new, postindustrial form of "manufactured uncertainty." According to Beck, ecological politics presents novel challenges associated with risk management and the dangers of environmental devastation, and novel possibilities associated with new social movements, new forms of public deliberation, and an emergent "sub-politics" located in civil society. But it also marks the limits of the state-centered public policy and instrumental rationality at the heart of classical left politics, whether revolutionary or social democratic. For Beck, ecological politics symbolizes the emergence of a more *skeptical* politics in which grandiose transformative or even remedial ambitions are abandoned.

This is the central theme of *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics* (1994), in which Giddens telegraphed the themes associated with his third-way idea. The left, he contends, has suffered a double blow: the demise of communism in Eastern Europe decisively destroyed the imagery of a revolutionary alternative to capitalism, and the paralysis of social democracy in Western Europe, associated with a widely acknowledged crisis of the welfare state, raised doubts about any kind of left politics. At the same time, new social movements have emerged that defy the "totalizing" logic of the project of socialist transformation. Events, Giddens held, have not borne out the socialist aspiration to supplant capitalism with a more just and "rational" social order.

> The world we live in today is not one subject to tight human mastery—the stuff of the ambitions of the left and, one could say, the nightmares of the right. Almost to the contrary, it is one of dislocation and uncertainty, a "runaway world." And, disturbingly, what was supposed to create greater and greater certainty—the advance of human knowledge and "controlled intervention" into society and nature—is actually deeply involved with this unpredictability. . . . Life has always been a risky business. . . [but] the sources, and the scope, of risk have altered. . . . They cannot be dealt with by age-old remedies; but neither do they respond to the Enlightenment prescription of more knowledge, more control. Put more accurately, the sorts of reactions they might evoke today are often as much about *damage control* and *repair* as about an endless process of increasing mastery.

Echoes of the Frankfurt School are obvious here, but Giddens did not simply rehash pieties about the limits of technique. He offered an analysis of new social forces associated with globalization and the new communications technologies; the limits of conventional welfare state forms of "social security" and redistribution; and the emergence of new political sensibilities and repertoires of action associated with an emphasis on civil society. Giddens did not romanticize these developments, but he considered them facts of life. They indicate, he argued, the importance of what he called "generative politics." As he wrote: "Generative politics is a. . . politics of the public domain, but does not situate itself in the old opposition between state and market. It works through providing material conditions, and organizational frameworks, for the life-political decisions taken by individuals and groups in the wider social order. Such a politics depends on the building of active trust, whether in the institutions of government or in connected agencies. . . generative politics is the main means of effectively approaching problems of poverty and social exclusion in the present day." Here are the central themes of Giddens's third way.

### The Third Way

*The Third Way* is subtitled *The Renewal of Social Democracy*. Some have claimed that this marks a shift from Giddens's earlier insistence that radical politics today is "beyond left and right." Yet, differences of emphasis and tone notwithstanding, the book is consistent with his earlier arguments. Giddens emphasizes that the third way is a project of the democratic left rather than of neoliberalism or conservatism, yet it is beyond left and right as these have typi-

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cally been understood.

First, it is eclectic and synthetic, reappropriating certain classically conservative themes: the need to repair damaged solidarities, the ethical and political importance of intermediate associations, and the limits of state policy. Second, it rejects a class-based politics, whether this be Marxism or the more conventional social democracy of Old Labour, in favor of a more complicated and ideologically inclusive politics of the so-called "active middle" or "radical center" (Giddens also uses the term "center left"—all these terms are used interchangeably and without much precision). Third, and most fatefully from the standpoint of its critics, it forswears a wholesale opposition to capitalism and embraces domestic and global markets as price-setting institutions and as engines of technological advance and economic growth. Perhaps the most widely quoted—and widely disparaged—passage in the book is Giddens's assertion that "no one any longer has any alternatives to capitalism." And yet Giddens clearly does seek to realize conventional left ideals of democratic equality and social justice, to limit the inequities associated with capitalist markets, and to develop shock absorbers for the fluctuations caused by market forces, particularly financial globalization and currency speculation. In these respects Giddens's third way is a variation on familiar social democratic themes.

Some of Giddens's critics have argued that his third way represents an accommodation to, if not a glorification of, the status quo. But if Giddens's argument is flawed, it is nonetheless true that the "accommodation" he endorses does not rest on some failure of nerve on his part. It is based on a cogent political analysis. Furthermore, the policies he outlines hardly constitute an uncritical acceptance of capitalism as it currently operates.

The first two chapters of the book seek to prove that classical socialism—and especially classical social democracy, epitomized by the postwar, Keynesian social contract—is outmoded. First, there has been a dramatic shift in the "structures of political support" for the left, due to the decline in numbers and cultural significance of the blue-collar, industrial working class and to the emergence of new constituencies and new postindustrial issues regarding gender and sexuality, ecology, peace and human rights, and lifestyle. As a result, social democratic parties in general have been politically weakened, and neoliberals have exploited this weakness and successfully delegitimized welfarist institutions and policies. This state of affairs, which few on the left would deny, is what makes necessary new thinking.

Second, social democratic parties have themselves begun this rethinking, as indicated by the British Labour Party's Policy Review of 1987; the Norwegian Labor Party's "Freedom Debate" of 1986-1988; the 1991 rebirth of the Italian Communist Party as the Democratic Party of the Left; and the policy debates within the German Social Democratic Party, leading to its new Basic Program of 1989. According to Giddens, social democratic leaders and policy analysts have registered the changed conditions, placing heightened emphasis on postindustrial issues, and recognizing the inadequacy of conventional welfare state redistributions and Keynesian demand management in an age of rampant globalization. This rethinking is, for Giddens, an accomplished fact of political life, and it is only on this new intellectual-political terrain that it makes sense to argue about politics.

Third, there exist novel political-economic conditions associated with globalization. Here Giddens draws upon a vast literature that documents the rise of a "post-Fordist" regime of flexible accumulation and flexible labor markets; new forms of production and consumption made possible by third-wave technologies associated with global communication; and new forms of global finance and speculation that, combined with the new communications technologies, make possible instantaneous currency flows, rendering the fiscal and monetary policies of nation-states virtually powerless. Following Beck, Giddens emphasizes that the modes of "reflexivity" and constant readjustment engendered by post-Fordist capitalism promote new forms of individualism and mobility that shape human identities for good and ill (on this, see also Richard Sennett's *The Corrosion of Character*). But he also emphasizes


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the instability and insecurity inscribed within this system. It isn't for him a Fukuyaman utopia; it is a set of challenges and opportunities that need to be addressed in a new way.

Giddens's third way is probably best seen as a politics of critical engagement with the forces of globalization. On the one hand, he rejects the neoliberal program of state retrenchment and unconditional global free trade. On the other hand, he repudiates a defense of the welfare state status quo ante—first, because these arrangements were ethically flawed, excessively bureaucratic and corporatist, and insufficiently attentive to the importance of "social capital," which cannot be sustained simply through statist redistributions; and second, because such arrangements are no longer sustainable, having been politically delegitimized and economically overtaken by the new forces of globalization. These forces, Giddens insists, cannot be stopped; they are too powerful; and no one has an intellectually or politically credible idea of how to stop them. The task of third-way politics, then, is neither to stop nor to master the forces of globalization, but to *contain* them and to insulate vulnerable social groups from their most harmful effects, thereby freeing individuals to pursue their potential benefits.

Giddens doesn't lay out a comprehensive agenda, but indicates the policies that third-wayers should pursue. One major theme is that the state should engage in the "active promotion" of the self-organization of civil society, so that citizens can democratically work together to address the problems associated with the new capitalism. So Giddens supports government subsidies for community development corporations and banks, urban enterprise zones, and local small business; the organization of community policing; tax credits to support the formation of third-sector associations, philanthropies, and service agencies; new forms of public education, including charter schools; and new forms of public/private/philanthropic partnerships designed to renovate public space and rebuild the economic and social infrastructure of communities. Such policies build social capital, he argues, and promote democratic participation and legitimacy, which makes them preferable to either market-based or statist solutions.

The promotion of citizens' councils and new deliberative forums, at the local, regional, and global levels, is another major theme of Giddens's third way. Yet while he emphasizes the importance of public support for civil society initiatives, he also defends the concept of a "social investment state" that backs up such initiatives with forms of universal provision. And he justifies this with an argument for "positive welfare"—a mode of public provision that, instead of simply offering a financial safety net for those in need, invests in "human capital" so that individuals can better navigate their own ways through economic risk and difficulty. He thus supports universal health care; public schools, adult education, and job retraining and placement; portability of individual pensions; family-friendly workplace policies; and efforts to absorb surplus labor by encouraging and financially rewarding "volunteer" activity in third-sector organizations (Giddens's ideas here mirror the more extensive proposals developed by Jeremy Rifkin in *The End of Work*). There is thus a synergy between state provision, the opportunities and capacities available to individuals and families, and forms of solidarity and social service provision generated in civil society.

THE POLICIES Giddens endorses are versions of the policies pioneered by Blair and Clinton. The rethinking that Giddens supports has, as he says, already begun, and the point of his book is to engage and deepen this discussion. Still, his arguments are not reducible to the Blair/Clinton policies.[2] For one thing, if the actual tendency of Blair's third-way policy is to emulate the American model, Giddens insists that "welfare expenditure remain at European rather than US levels." A major sub-theme of his book, echoed in John Gray's *False Dawn*, is that Northern European models of social democratic renewal are in many ways preferable to the American model. And Giddens explicitly distances himself from Blair when he observes, for example, that "education and training have become the new mantra for social democratic politicians. Tony Blair famously describes his three main priorities in government as 'education, education, educa-



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tion.' . . . Yet the idea that education can reduce inequalities in a direct way should be regarded with some skepticism." Fighting poverty, he insists, "requires an injection of economic resources, but applied to support local initiative. Leaving people mired in benefits tends to exclude them from the larger society. Reducing benefits to force individuals into work pushes them into already crowded low-wage labor markets. Community building initiatives concentrate upon the multiple problems individuals and families face, including job quality, health and child care, education and transport."

So Giddens's argument goes beyond the Blair agenda, in both purposiveness and comprehensiveness. Although he rejects aggressive programs of nationalization, planning, or redistribution, he envisages the third way as a multiplicity of policy experiments that address a range of social problems associated with the negative effects of contemporary capitalism. Whatever its flaws, this is more than an electoral tactic or a post hoc rationale for Blair's government. Indeed, as Giddens concludes his book, "image alone isn't enough. There must be something solid behind the hype, otherwise the public will see through the façade pretty quickly. If all New Labour had to offer were media savvy, its time on the political stage would be short, and its contribution to the revival of social democracy limited." *The Third Way* is an effort to argue on behalf of something deeper, a "substantive agenda" that is still a work in progress.

### The Third Way Reconsidered

Sidney Blumenthal, erstwhile Clintonite, has described the third way as "the practical experience of two leading politicians [Clinton and Blair] who win elections, operate in the real world, and understand the need, in a global economy, to find common solutions for common problems." As I have argued, Giddens's third way is more than this. But saying that doesn't establish the validity of his claims about the third way as a strategy of "renewal." Here Giddens's critics are on to something. For if his arguments are not reducible to the Clinton/Blair agenda, some of them have nonetheless given cover to some of the more regrettable aspects of Clinton/Blair, most important the abandonment of working-class and poor constituencies in order to capture the middle-class center, the embrace of global free trade, and an emphasis upon "modernization" that often amounts to little more than a depoliticizing glorification of third-wave technologies.[3] With regard to these matters, it is legitimate to wonder whether what is being defended is a renewal or a repudiation of social democracy.[4]

It is notable that *The Third Way* contains no index entries for unions, trade unions, or working class. Giddens has nothing to offer when it comes to rebuilding union movements in postindustrial societies or developing new forms of global labor solidarity. His book mentions the World Trade Organization (WTO) twice, treating it under the general heading of "global civil society" or "global governance." But it provides no sustained analysis of this organization and its devaluation of labor, or of the emergence of political movements challenging it, or of ways of reforming or constraining world trade or the global economy generally. This is not to say that Giddens repudiates the labor movement or offers a blanket endorsement of the existing regime of free trade. He does neither. But his discussions often proceed at a level of generality in which these important and contentious issues get lost.

A similar problem emerges when Giddens talks about "positive welfare." He insists that today's primary public policy problem is not inequality but exclusion: "Exclusion is not about gradations of inequality, but about mechanisms that act to detach groups of people from the social mainstream." He is surely correct to insist that the problem of inequality is not reducible to disparities of income or wealth. Policies that attack these two head on are likely to leave other forms of inequality intact. Nonetheless, inequalities of income and wealth are crucial features of the capitalist societies in which we live, and Giddens has to say more than he does about the relation between them and "exclusion" more generally.

Giddens talks a great deal about the need for social democrats to acknowledge the danger of governmental "waste" and "inefficiency." But he says little about the extraordinary pay disparities between high level corporate man-


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agers and ordinary employees and the widening gap between rich and poor in advanced capitalist societies—which are questionable on ethical grounds but also on grounds of efficiency. He is too often clearer about what he is against—above all, old-style social democratic income redistribution—than about what he is for—beyond expanded educational opportunities and the subsidy of third-sector institutions.

What is missing, quite simply, is any account of the politically constraining effects of the unequal distribution of money and power or any serious treatment of politics as a domain of conflict. Although Giddens offers a cogent account of the decline of the postwar social democratic coalition—and although he indicates the importance of new lines of cleavage—he says little about the salience of different forms of contestation, whether these are class conflicts, conflicts associated with "new social movements," or conflicts fueled by ethnic, racial, and sexual resentments. As many critics have observed, the communitarian, win-win rhetoric of his programmatic arguments ignores the obstacles to the values and policies he supports and the possibility of backlash against these policies.[5] There is an almost Panglossian character to Giddens's political vision. It registers issues of immigration, multiculturalism, and exclusion, but what is most fractious and nasty in politics today—calls for "ethnic cleansing," the resurgence of social Darwinian racism, or the scapegoating of "foreigners"—is not discussed.

These analytical weaknesses are accentuated rather than mitigated in Giddens's most recent book, *The Third Way and its Critics*, where he purports to respond to critics of his third-way arguments. He persuasively recapitulates many of the points I have summarized, but his responses to critics tend toward the formulaic, reinforcing the sense that Giddens's principal interlocutors are no longer his fellow left intellectuals but the politicians—Blair, Prodi, Cardoso—who blurb the book. While he maintains that "third way politics as a matter of principle must not be complacent or collusive in the face of power," and insists that "left of center governments mustn't shirk confronting corporate interests where it is necessary to do so—and it often *is* necessary to do so," he repeatedly disparages "anti-corporate" rhetoric and offers virtually no discussion of the kinds of "confrontation" he alludes to. Much of what he says about the limits of anticorporate rhetoric is indeed sensible. But his comments add nothing of substance to the discussion of corporate power. Similarly, the only indexed reference to unions is a remark about the importance of collaborative corporate/union labor relations. He has nothing to say about redressing the declining power of worker organizations.

In other areas, his formulations actually represent a step backward. He is more emphatic in his defense of fiscal conservatism and balanced budgets. He maintains that "it is no longer feasible, or desirable, to have very steeply graduated income tax of the sort that existed in many countries thirty years ago. All countries have pulled back from such a practice." This is a revealing formulation. What it means is that neoliberalism has been successful in attacking progressive taxation. Perhaps it isn't possible to return to the taxation strategies that preceded the neoliberalism of Reagan and Thatcher. But Giddens offers no serious discussion of what *is* possible, instead simply taking for granted the neoliberal position because of its political dominance. There are other examples of this in *The Third Way and its Critics*. Now Giddens himself persistently blurs the distinction between his third way and Clinton/Blair's. Indeed, his entire discussion conflates criticism of his own arguments and criticism of the policies associated with Clinton and Blair, as if he can't see any difference between his arguments as a social theorist and the policy and propaganda of their governments. Whatever critical edge the earlier book possessed is lost, and the conclusion that Giddens has become a celebrant of neoliberal globalization becomes more difficult to avoid.

Here it is useful to compare Giddens's account of globalization to that defended by Zygmunt Bauman in *Globalization: The Human Consequences*. Bauman offers a sustained description of the economic, demographic, and political dark sides of globalization, the interpenetration of mobility and forcible displace-

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ment, the asymmetry between the opportunities available in advanced societies and the utter abjection of so much of the rest of humanity, and the reinforcing effects of globalized markets and technologies on the one hand, and political fundamentalism on the other. Giddens, by contrast, is always upbeat in his account. It is not that he is an apologist for flexible accumulation, wedded to an uncritical conception of individualism, as some critics have asserted;[6] for he does register the serious challenges of globalization and flexibility, and he also supports forms of solidarity that offset the effects of both. But he says much too little about just how challenging globalization and flexibility are to the values he holds.

Hilary Wainwright offers another useful contrast, both in her *Arguments for a New Left*[7] and in a debate with Giddens published in 1998 in the London *Guardian*. In the course of the debate, Wainwright expressed sympathy for Giddens's call for "experimenting with non-orthodox forms of democratic participation," but worried that this language was "a smokescreen for a very different practice." For her, the third way employs "a discourse from an honorable new left tradition (from E. P. Thompson to Ken Livingstone . . .) to legitimate policies which take the line of least resistance to those with wealth and power." Giddens responded by arguing that Wainwright's position was "formulaic" (with its "New Left" appeals), too nostalgic for Livingstone's short-lived Greater London Council (GLC), and insufficiently attuned to the challenges of globalization.

In the course of this debate, important policy disagreements emerged regarding the historical significance of Livingstone's GLC, the desirability of support for Livingstone (who at that time was gearing up for what became his successful insurgent candidacy for mayor of London), and about whether essential public services such as transport and education should be open to experimental forms of private investment (this became the central issue of Livingstone's campaign—and came back to haunt him after his victory).[8] Wainwright insists that such services ought to be publicly financed and controlled, and that the principal civil society partners of a left government should be "democratic civic organizations, in the community as well as the workplace; cooperative and community businesses, as well as trade unions and voluntary organizations, not unaccountable concentrations of wealth." Giddens, on the other hand, is more amenable to public/private partnerships involving capital, though he insists that such efforts should not sacrifice public control.[9]

There is much common ground here, but also significant differences of emphasis, with Giddens leaning toward Blair and New Labour's effort to promote a nonadversarial relationship with capital, and Wainwright leaning toward Blair's New Left critics. Indeed, the most serious critiques of Blairism and also of the third way are to be found in the pages of British New Left journals: *Soundings*, *New Left Review*, and Wainwright's own *Red Pepper*.[10] Here one finds an attention to corporate power and to the challenges of left movement-building that is largely absent from Giddens's texts, which fail to pose hard questions and are too sanguine about the promise of New Labour.

NONETHELESS, Giddens's overall argument, in spite of its limits, is in many ways superior to those of his critics from the left. For whatever he avoids and omits, he is generally right about what a renewed social democracy is capable of producing politically in the world today. Giddens's horizon is the horizon of Blair and Clinton, the horizon of a humanized neoliberalism, where public policy takes some of the edge off of the externalities and injustices of capitalism and promotes new forms of "human" and "social" capital—but does not propose any more fundamental reform. Such policies can do some good, particularly when measured against those of a less benign neoliberalism; but they are limited and frustrating, in ways that need frankly to be acknowledged. They cannot eliminate the problems of inequality and insecurity that they are intended to "solve." But given the current constellation of political forces and the demographic and ideological trends behind them, there is little reason to expect anything more radical than what Blair or Clinton represent. On this score, Giddens is closer to the truth


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than his most penetrating critics. For while they correctly discern the limitations of the third way, they are too credulous about the possibilities of moving beyond them.

This does not mean that we have arrived at the end of history. Political insurgencies are surely possible at the margins of the political-economic system. Recent demonstrations against the International Monetary Fund and the WTO are instances of this; the campaign against sweatshop labor is another; experiments in city and/or regional government, such as Sustainable Milwaukee or Livingstone's London, are other examples. In each instance, some aspect of the neoliberal regime is contested, and reforms, at the margins, may be instituted. Intellectual debate about such challenges, and about their limits, is indispensable. And here there is no reason to remain wedded to Giddens's formulations. His New Left critics offer a broader range of alternative futures, and they rightly see that political pressure is necessary to keep third-way liberalism honest.

But here we are still firmly within the confines of global capitalism, on Giddens's terrain, the terrain of a third way that lacks the vision or power of previous historical versions of the left, to which the left today relates primarily as gadfly rather than hegemonic alternative. Alex Callinicos has rightly derided such a chastened approach as a "de-ideologization of politics," a "coming to terms with liberal capitalism."[11] But it is hard to see how one can intelligently defend what Callinicos wants—an adversarial effort somehow to transcend capitalism or to challenge globally what he calls "the structures of capitalist domination." If by "anticapitalist struggle" we mean efforts to overcome specific injustices, such as sweatshop labor or the unchecked mobility of capital, then such efforts are surely worthy, and it makes sense to press them forward and radicalize third-way public policies. But the overheated rhetoric of "anticapitalist struggle" is unhelpful, intellectually or politically, if it is meant to imply anything more profound.

The most troubling aspect of Giddens's argument is not the new thinking he seeks to promote, his experimental approach toward public/private collaborations, or even his claim that "no one has any alternatives to capitalism." It is his disinclination, and perhaps his inability, to acknowledge the limitations of this new thinking in the face of powerful antidemocratic and anti-egalitarian social forces at work in the world, to recognize the tragic limitations of what remains of the "historic project" that once went confidently by the name of "the left," and, correlatively, to endorse the campaigns and movements that push for more substantial reforms. Facing left, Giddens is very tough-minded about what is possible: nothing more, he tells us, than the third way. Boosting the third way, he is quite amazingly credulous about what the future holds—and not so far, ironically, from some of his left critics who expect a new proletarian internationalism capable of contesting global capital.

What is needed today is less credulity and more *skepticism* toward both globalization and simple-minded challenges to it. A skepticism of this kind is defended by one of Giddens's intellectual mentors, Beck, and it is implicit in the best of what Giddens has written in recent years. For if we live in a "runaway world," overtaken by complex forces beyond our collective control, then there is no reason to be sanguine and every reason to be suspicious of those with power. Penetrating social analysis is necessary, but also a tragic sensibility, at home on the margins of the system, challenging particular injustices, pursuing creative policy responses in the absence of either a totalizing alternative or an oppositional mass politics. Such a sensibility does not require us to accommodate ourselves to capitalism or to the political compromises of the center. It allows us to question, to express indignation, to grope for alternatives, but without the hope of One Big Alternative. In the words of Beck, "skepticism, contrary to widespread error, makes everything possible again: ethics, morality, knowledge, faith, society, and criticism, but differently, a few sizes smaller, more tentative, more revisable and more capable of learning and thus more curious, more open to the unsuspected."[12]

There are good reasons why such a skepticism is rarely articulated publicly. It offers little inspiration for activists, who would certainly

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prefer a more buoyant and heroic rhetoric of opposition. And it is too nuanced, too ambivalent, to gain a hearing in the melodramatic world of postmodern publicity, a world of simplicities, slogans, and celebrities. Such a skepticism presses against the grain of contemporary society. And it undermines the heroic imagery of anticapitalist struggle that has long nourished segments of the left. But it steers us away from a triumphalism of either the present or the future, toward whatever modest possibilities of creativity and rebellion actually present themselves. And, above all, it is honest. In the world in which we live, this is no mean thing. ●

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1. See Joanne Barkan's clever annotation, "The Third Way/*Die Neu Mitte*," *Dissent* (Spring 2000), pp. 51-65.

2. On this, see John Westergaard, "Where Does the Third Way Lead?" *New Political Economy*, 4, no. 3 (November 1999).

3. See Geoff Andrews, "New Left and New Labour: Modernisation or a New Modernity?" *Soundings* 13 (Autumn 1999), pp. 14-24, and Alan Finlayson, "Tony Blair and the Jargon of Modernization," *Soundings* 10 (Winter 1998).

4. Here, again, see Joanne Barkan's critique.

5. See Perry Anderson, "Comment: Power, Politics, and the Enlightenment," in David Miliband, ed., *Reinventing the Left* (London: Polity Press, 1994), and Chantal Mouffe, "A Politics Without Adversary?" in *The Democratic Paradox* (Verso, 2000, forthcoming).

6. See Anthony King, "Legitimating Post-Fordism: A Critique of Anthony Giddens's Later Works," *Telos* 115 (Spring 1999), pp. 61-78.

7. Hilary Wainwright, *Arguments for a New Left: Answering the Free Market Right* (London: Blackwell, 1994). On social democratic partyism, see also John Keane, *Democracy and Civil Society* (London: Polity Press, 1988).

8. The Greater London Council was the short-lived form of London municipal government that sought, under the leadership of Ken Livingstone from 1982-1986, to work with new social movements on the left to promote a more egalitarian public policy in London. It was abolished in 1986 by the Parliament under the Thatcher government.

9. Anthony Giddens and Hilary Wainwright, "Is There Such a Thing as a Third Way in Politics?" the *Guardian* (Saturday, May 23, 1998), p. 1.

10. *Soundings* has run a series of brilliant articles and editorials on these themes. See especially Michael Rustin's "A Third Way With Teeth," *Soundings* 11 (Spring 1999), pp. 7-21.

11. Alex Callinicos, "Social Theory Put to the Test of Politics: Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens," *New Left Review* 236 (July-August 1999). See my response, "Intellectuals, Marxism, and Politics," and Callinicos's rejoinder, "Impossible Anticapitalism?" in *New Left Review* 2 (March/April 2000).

12. Ulrich Beck, *Democracy Without Enemies* (London: Polity Press, 1998), pp. 113-14.

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# The Mauling of Public Space

**Margaret Kohn**

In his book *Edge City*, Joel Garreau tells the story of Bridgewater Township, a community of about forty thousand people located in New Jersey. Like earlier cities that were situated at the intersection of transportation routes, it owes its location to the confluence of two superhighways, routes 287 and 78. Although Bridgewater was originally a bedroom community for professionals who worked in New York, it gradually developed its own local economy with offices, businesses, and services. What it lacked was a sense of place. Local residents dreamed of a town center, some composite of a New England village green and a Tuscan piazza, a place where old people could gossip, young people could *farsi vedere* (make oneself seen), and mothers could bring young children while getting a latté, a sandwich, or some postage stamps. After more than a decade of discussion, in 1988 they inaugurated Bridgewater Commons, a mall.

Ironically, the Bridgewater Commons Mall was not originally the initiative of commercial real estate developers. It was the compromise reached by the community agency committed to maintaining the small town's quality of life and avoiding the strip-mall aesthetic. Individual retailers could not provide the capital necessary to implement a comprehensive plan that included environmentally sensitive landscaping and rational traffic management. More important, a traditional downtown could not guarantee the most highly prized amenities: safety, cleanliness, and order.

The Bridgewater Commons and hundreds of supermalls like it have long troubled architects and critics who bemoan the homogeneity, sterility, and banality of the suburbs. Approaching the mall primarily as an aesthetic or even a sociological issue, however, overlooks the enormous political consequences of the privatization of public space. Public sidewalks and streets are practically the only remaining available sites for unscripted political activity. They are the places where insurgent political candidates gather signatures, striking workers publicize their cause, and religious groups pass out leaflets. It is true that television, newspapers, and direct mail constantly deliver a barrage of information, including political leaflets. But unlike the face-to-face politics that takes place in the public sphere, these forms of communication do not allow the citizen to talk back, to ask a question, to tell a story, to question a premise. The politics of the public sphere requires no resources—except time and perseverance. Public spaces are the last domains where the opportunity to communicate is not something bought and sold.

And they are rapidly disappearing. These places are not banned by authoritarian legislatures. Their disappearance is more benign but no less troubling. The technology of the automobile, the expansion of the federal highway system, and the growth of residential suburbs have changed the way Americans live. Today, the only place that many Americans encounter strangers is in the shopping mall. The most important public place is now private. And this is probably not an accident.

The privatization of public space poses a number of conceptual challenges for public policy makers. Is it ownership or use that determines whether a particular place is truly private? How should the right to private property be weighed against the legitimate state interest in sustaining a public sphere? Does it violate the First Amendment if a shopping mall prohibits orderly political speech?

The U.S. Supreme Court has tried to answer these questions in a series of decisions that have determined government policy de-

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fining the public sphere. The Supreme Court's doctrine in "the shopping mall cases" reflects a growing unwillingness to engage the broader political issues emerging from rapid social change.

### The Shopping Mall Cases

The Supreme Court addressed the implications of private ownership of quasi-public spaces in a series of cases decided between 1946 and 1980. The Court first considered the issue in 1946 in *Marsh v. Alabama*, which dealt with a Jehovah's Witness who was arrested for distributing religious pamphlets in the business district of a company-owned town. The majority decided that the arrest violated the freedom of the press and freedom of religion guaranteed by the First Amendment and applied to the states under the Fourteenth Amendment. The opinion, written by Justice Hugo Black, emphasized that all citizens must have the same rights, regardless of whether they live in a traditional municipality or a company-owned town. He noted that a typical community of privately owned residences would not have had the power to pass a municipal ordinance forbidding the distribution of religious literature on street corners. Why then, should a corporation be allowed to do so?

The company—Gulf Shipbuilding Corporation—based its argument on the common law and constitutional right to private property. If an individual does not have to allow Jehovah's Witnesses into her home, why should the company have to allow them on its property? The court, however, rejected this logic. It cited a long list of precedents—cases involving bridges, roads, and ferries—to establish that the right to private property is not absolute. Especially when a private company performs public functions, it opens itself up to greater government scrutiny and regulation. Given that the town was freely accessible to outsiders, it implicitly invited in the general public, thereby voluntarily incurring quasi-public obligations. The concept of "invitee" went on to play an important role in desegregation cases. According to the Court in *Marsh v. Alabama*, "The more an owner, for his advantage, opens up his property for use by the public in general, the more do his rights become circumscribed by the statutory and constitutional rights of those who use it."

The opinion concluded that property rights must be weighed against other state interests. Justice Black emphasized that a democracy had a compelling state interest in maintaining free and open channels of communication so that all of its residents could fulfill their duties as citizens: "To act as good citizens they must be informed. In order to enable them to be properly informed their information must be uncensored." A concurring opinion by Justice Felix Frankfurter stated that fundamental civil liberties guaranteed by the Constitution must have precedence over property rights.

Based on the reasoning in *Marsh v. Alabama*, it would seem that the right to free speech would apply to other private arenas that were similarly open to a broader public. In the 1972 decision *Lloyd v. Tanner*, the Court considered whether First Amendment guarantees extended to the shopping mall. This time, however, the majority upheld the mall's policy forbidding the distribution of handbills on its premises. The owners could exclude expressive conduct, even if it did not disrupt the commercial functions of the mall. Writing for the majority, Justice Lewis Powell argued that a shopping mall was not the functional equivalent of a company town because it was not a space where individuals performed multiple activities. It was simply devoted to shopping. Although it was true that the shopping mall implicitly invited the general public onto its premises, this did not transform it into a public space. According to Powell, political activists misunderstood the invitation if they turned the mall into a public forum; the invitation to the public was only to shop. Moreover, since the First Amendment only limited "state action" there was no constitutional basis to apply it to private entities.

In *Lloyd v. Tanner* the Court did not overrule *Marsh v. Alabama*; instead it emphasized how the two cases differed. The mall was no company town. Basically, the Court concluded that activists had other opportunities to engage in political activity. They could make use of the public roads and sidewalks on the perimeter of the shopping mall. The assumption was that citizens had other chances to be exposed to


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diverse ideas and viewpoints. Because they presumably spent, at most, part of their day at the shopping mall, they could become informed citizens elsewhere.

Although the Court tried to emphasize the differences between the two cases, it actually modified its view of the relevant doctrine. In the *Lloyd* decision, there was no idealistic discussion of the free exchange of ideas necessary to maintain an informed citizenry. Rather than considering the goal of the First Amendment—presumably to foster the free expression characteristic of a democracy—the Court focused narrowly on the supposed absence of state action. It decided that private property does not "lose its private character merely because the public is generally invited to use it for designated purposes."

IT IS PUZZLING that the justices in *Lloyd* did not really analyze the logic of *Marsh v. Alabama* on the critical issue of state action. In the company-town case, Justice Black suggested that the enforcement of state criminal trespass laws constituted state action. If the state may make no law abridging the freedom of speech, then it cannot pass a criminal-trespass statute penalizing a citizen simply for engaging in non-disruptive expression in a place where she would be legitimately allowed to enter. This same logic was used in a much more famous case, *Shelley v. Kraemer*, which was decided by the same court in 1948. In that case, the Supreme Court struck down a restrictive covenant preventing residents from selling their homes to blacks. Although the contract was undeniably private, it could not be enforced without "the active intervention of the state courts, supported by the full panoply of state power." According to this decision, private actors could not use the police and the courts to enforce practices that violate constitutional rights. In *Lloyd v. Tanner*, the Supreme Court decided to overlook these precedents, assuming a much narrower definition of what constitutes state action.

The last shopping mall case, *Pruneyard Shopping Center v. Robins* (1980), dealt with a group of high school students who attempted to gather signatures for a petition protesting a United Nations resolution condemning Zionism. The California State Supreme Court originally found in favor of the students, ruling that the state's criminal-trespass law would constitute state action for the purposes of the First Amendment protections. The shopping mall owners appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, claiming that their Fifth Amendment right not to be deprived of "private property, without due process of law" was violated by the California decision. They argued that the mall was no public forum. To require the mall to allow political solicitation was tantamount to "taking without just compensation." The owners also claimed that the right to exclude others is an essential component of the definition of private property.

The *Pruneyard* decision, which governs to this day, articulated a mediating position. The Supreme Court rejected the mall owners' claim to absolute dominion over their property. Again drawing upon a long history of precedents regarding public regulation of private property, the court concluded that the due process clause only required that the laws "not be unreasonable, arbitrary, or capricious and that the means selected shall have a real and substantial relation to the objective sought." The right to exclude others would only be decisive if the mall owners could prove that allowing orderly political speech would substantially decrease the economic value of their property.

The Court, however, also rejected the students' claims to protection under the free speech clause of the First Amendment. Since the facts of the case were substantially the same as those in *Lloyd v. Tanner*, the Court saw no reason to reconsider the issue. It still insisted that the mall was private and therefore outside of the reach of the Bill of Rights. But there was a second issue at stake. The students had challenged the shopping center's policy under both the U.S. and the California State Constitutions. The language of the California free speech clause was more expansive. Article 1, section 2, of the California Constitution provides

> Every person may freely speak, write and publish his or her sentiments on all subjects, being responsible for the abuse of this right. A law may not restrain or abridge liberty of speech or press.

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The U.S. Supreme Court found that there was no reason why a state or federal statute or constitutional provision could not guarantee access to the public areas of private malls. This finding was consistent with an earlier decision, *Hudgens v. National Labor Relations Board* (1976), which held that striking workers had no First Amendment right to picket in a mall, but they could assert such a right under federal labor relations laws protecting the processes associated with collective bargaining. Since the *Pruneyard* decision, fourteen states have considered whether their own state constitutions protect expressive conduct in shopping malls. Only five—California, Oregon, New Jersey, Colorado, and Massachusetts—recognized broader protections for speech.

### Privatization and Public Policy

More than twenty years have passed since the *Pruneyard* decision. Although the law has not changed in that period, society has. There is something quaint and anachronistic about reading the old shopping mall cases. They describe the world we take for granted as something new and marvelous, and they could not even imagine the world we will soon live in. Writing in 1972, Justice Powell described the Lloyd Center in Portland Oregon like this:

> The Center embodies a relatively new concept in shopping center design. The stores are all located within a single large, multi-level building complex sometimes referred to as the "Mall." Within this complex, in addition to the stores, there are parking facilities, malls, private sidewalks, stairways, escalators, gardens, an auditorium, and a skating rink. Some of the stores open directly on the outside public sidewalks, but most open on the interior privately owned malls. Some stores open on both. There are no public streets or public sidewalks within the building complex, which is enclosed and entirely covered except for the landscaped portions of some of the interior malls.

This futuristic mall had sixty shops and a thousand parking spaces. Compared to today's supermalls, Lloyd Center is a neighborhood corner store. By 1990, there were more than three hundred mega-supermalls, each with at least five department stores and three hundred shops. The West Edmonton Mall has more than 800 shops, 11 department stores, 110 restaurants, 20 movie theaters, 13 night clubs, a chapel, a large hotel, and a lake.

In 1972, the Court concluded that this new concept in shopping—"sometimes referred to as the 'Mall'"—in no way resembled a company town. It seemed obvious that a mall was simply devoted to a single activity—shopping—while a town was defined by the physical proximity of diverse spaces and activities—housing and services, leisure and work, consumption, education, and production. A mall is a place you visit; a town is a place in which you live. But this has been slowly changing. Industry watchers report that by 1999 the average mall visit lasted four hours, up from an hour two decades before.

The mall has become an entertainment mecca, a major employer, and a premier vacation destination. The Travel Industry Association of America reported that shopping is the number one vacation activity in America. The Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota, attracts 37.5 million visitors annually. Its hundreds of retail establishments are not the only draw—it has a wedding chapel, the nation's largest indoor amusement park, a post office, a police station, and a school.

The mall is also a workplace. The West Edmonton Mall has more than fifteen thousand employees. Although they do not manufacture automobiles or aircraft carriers, they do produce the spiral of fantasy, desire, and consumption that is now North America's number one export.

The mall is becoming not only a genuinely multi-use facility, but a completely self-contained utopia of suburban life. In the morning the doors open to waiting seniors, the famous mall-walkers who appreciate the controlled climate, cleanliness, and safety. At night, the security guards have to herd out the lingering teenagers, who are in no rush to go home to their monotonous housing developments. The mall is clearly the nodal point of social life, but is it a town?

An April 1999 survey by the journal *Shopping Center World* found that half of the 150 new projects under construction are multi-use malls. Some of these are New Urbanist inspired developments that try to mimic the ap-


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peal of old-fashioned downtown areas. They link higher density housing with office and retail space, all unified by architectural cues that evoke the turn of the century. Fifty of the new multi-use malls include office space, libraries, housing, or hotels.

One such project is in the new Towers at Zona Rosa, a shopping mall situated ten minutes from downtown Kansas City. Although the plan relies on thirty thousand square foot department stores to anchor the retail plaza, it also includes loft-style apartments situated above boutiques and cafés. Underground parking, decorative street lamps, indigenous plants, and outdoor tables are among the lifestyle-enhancing amenities. As theme parks, megamalls, and gated communities merge, nostalgic recreations of the village green replace actual public space.

Living at the mall might still seem unusual, but it is a culmination of a dynamic that has been accelerating throughout the 1990s—the emergence of what Joel Garreau has called edge cities. The growth of edge cities reflects a complete transformation of the spatial structure of postwar American life. The typical pattern of bedroom communities situated along the outskirts of urban cores is disappearing. He reports that Americans no longer sleep in the suburbs and work in the city. In dozens of cities, including Houston, Boston, Tampa, and Denver, there is more office space outside of the central business district than within it. This new office space is built in edge cities—suburbs that now incorporate millions of square feet of commercial development.

There are undoubtedly positive sides to this development. As more companies relocate to the suburbs, the average American's commute time decreases. But as workplaces become more and more decentralized, the density needed to support public transportation like commuter railroads also disappears. Although your suburban office park may be closer to your home, it is probably not served by the subway. It becomes ever more commonplace to move from home to office to shopping mall in the automobile. The edge city citizen need never traverse public space. It becomes possible to spend an entire day or lifetime without encountering street corners, bus stops, or park benches.

The new edge city geography poses a challenge to the doctrine established by the Supreme Court. If private space takes on a public character in cases like the company town when it colonizes every aspect of life, then it is time to reconsider the character of the mall. But this is unlikely to happen. As recently as 1992, the Supreme Court held that labor organizers had no right to try to contact potential members by passing out leaflets in the parking lot of a Lechmere's store—this despite the fact that the only alternative space was a forty-six-foot-wide grassy strip separating the lot from the highway. In 1999, the Minnesota State Supreme Court heard a challenge from an animal rights group that was prevented from peacefully protesting in the common area of the 4.2-million-square-foot Mall of America. The protestors argued that the mall was a public space because it had been heavily subsidized by the state, which provided $186 million in public financing. The Justices found that "neither the invitation to the public to shop and be entertained . . . nor the public financing used to develop the property are state action for the purposes of free speech" under the Minnesota Constitution.

### Politics and Public Space

This string of defeats is a setback for political activists and proponents of an active public life. But it could have the unintended consequence of channeling debate over privatization into the public arena and out of the closed chambers of the Court. If judicial intervention will not protect the public sphere, then political action still presents an alternative. Congress or state legislatures could pass statutes mandating that malls of a certain size must provide access to community groups. They could also establish guidelines to extend broader protections for political activity. One way to do this would be to pass legislation applying speech and petition guarantees to the functional equivalents of traditional public forums. As indicated in the *Pruneyard* decision, there is no constitutional provision that would invalidate these kinds of laws. Because labor unions are dependent on tactics like the picket line, they would be pow-

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erful proponents of such a law and useful allies for other activist groups fighting to maintain access to public space. As the Seattle-inspired euphoria wanes, the struggle for such legislation could unify labor and other social movements.

Even in areas where such tactics were unsuccessful at the state level, it would still be possible to adopt similar strategies at the local level. The obvious place to start is to support downtown business districts and other public places that still encourage diversity and invite political activity. But this individualist solution, by itself, is naïve. Collective action is also necessary. When new, large-scale mall developments are proposed, citizens have the most leverage to demand some form of continued public access. The support of local government agencies, town councils, and planning boards is crucial for a project on the scale of the modern mall. By building and upgrading roads, modifying zoning, and approving permits, localities still have bargaining power over some aspects of development. They could negotiate a policy guaranteeing free access to a community booth or public courtyard in the mall.

Why are these tactics seldom even employed, let alone successful? Although malls like the one in Bridgewater manage to preserve natural oases like "Mac's Brook," they fail to protect oases of public openness in a privatized world. This is not only the fault of greedy developers. Most people do not value the disruption and unease caused by other peoples' political speech. One of the appeals of the mall is precisely that it provides an environment carefully designed to exclude any source of discomfort. The soothing lighting, polished surfaces, pleasant temperature, and enticing displays are not the only allure; part of the fantasy involves entering a world where no homeless person, panhandler, or zealot can disturb the illusion of a harmonious world.

In the mauling of public space, democratic theorists have confronted extremely sophisticated marketing experts, and the democratic theorists have lost. The political theorists who are most concerned with democracy have failed to offer a compelling rationale to challenge the privatization of public space. By concentrating on the value of speech rather than the importance of space, they turn the public sphere into an abstraction. We need to engage in more careful reflection on the reasons why we should protect free speech and public space.

In academic circles, theorists argue that deliberation between citizens is the most promising way to reach rational political decisions. Moreover, they stress that rational, public-spirited discussions are necessary to legitimate democratic procedures and make sure that politics does not degenerate into mere struggles over power. These theories of deliberative democracy are indebted to Jürgen Habermas's influential work on the ideal speech situation: if everybody plays fair, tells the truth, speaks respectfully, and only makes claims in the name of the general good, then a rational consensus could emerge.

At first, it seems like this emphasis on "deliberative democracy" is precisely what is needed to reinvigorate our commitment to the public sphere, to street corners with soap boxes and speakers, or at least their modern equivalents. These theories offer the perfect justification of the speech clause of the First Amendment. But the concept of deliberation will not be useful if it emphasizes the rationality that emerges from the ideal speech situation. Let's face it. Nothing approaching the ideal speech situation ever happens in the mall. The ideal speech situation is basically an extremely idealized depiction of the norms of scholarly journals or conferences. We need free speech and public places not because they help us, as a society, reach a rational consensus, but because they disrupt the consensus that we have already reached too easily. While reasonable arguments often just reinforce distance, public space establishes proximity. This proximity has distinctive properties that democratic theorists often overlook. We can learn something from facing our fears that we cannot learn from debating principles. The panhandler and the homeless person do not convince us by their arguments, but their presence conveys a powerful message. They reveal the rough edges of our shiny surfaces. The union picketer and right-to-lifer confront us with meaningful and enduring conflict. Provocative speech cannot be something that


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happens elsewhere—in academic journals, conferences, mass mailings, and highly scripted town meetings. Sometimes it must be in your face for it to have any impact. For a robust democracy we need more than rational deliberation; we need public places that remind us that politics matter.

In New Jersey, at least, malls will be part of this public space. That is the implication of a decision reached by the New Jersey State Supreme Court on June 13, 2000. In a unanimous vote, the court held that Mill Creek, a New Jersey mall, could not restrict free speech by forbidding political groups from leafleting. Although the owners could place reasonable restrictions on expressive conduct to make sure that politics did not disrupt the commercial activities of the mall, they could not deny access to the only place left in New Jersey where there is an opportunity for face-to-face contact with large groups of people. By a circuitous route, the dream of Bridgewater will come true and the residents will get their commons. ●

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# Lepers at the City Gate

*Single Room Occupancy and the Housing Crisis*

**Andy Merrifield**

It's a sultry July morning; I am sitting on a low wall outside a three-story brownstone on West 120th Street, a stone's throw away from Mount Morris Park, in Harlem. Four workmen, covered in dust and dirt, are coming and going, throwing debris and masonry onto a nearby dumpster, bantering with each other and disappearing into a gutted building, number seventeen. From my perch, I can hear drilling and banging inside. Overhead, there's a lamppost adorned with a banner welcoming me to "Mount Morris Historic District," a patch bound by Lenox Avenue to the west, 124th Street to the north, 119th Street to the south, and Mount Morris Park West to the east. (The park, which interrupts Fifth Avenue for a five-block stretch and is dominated by a craggy outcrop of rocks, was renamed Marcus Garvey Park in 1973, in honor of the Jamaican black nationalist.) My eyes follow a uniform row of red brick and terra-cotta houses, most built around 1890, grand in their day; many are now burnt-out shells, boarded up and abandoned. Wire fences seal several off; knee-high weeds and accumulated litter make everything feel forlorn and menacing. I watch a disheveled African-American man, with two loaded bags, emerge from one ruin across the street.

As I ponder the scene and look more closely at the fine detail, I notice amid the wreckage and dereliction that a few structures actually look healthy. They have fine wooden shutters in their windows, renovated façades, recent paint jobs, and window boxes bearing fresh flowers. These new rehabs look quite delightful; they are the telltale signs of change in the air, a revival of sorts in Harlem, where, after years of neglect, properties are miraculously being spruced up, money is flowing in after decades of flowing out, and middle-class people, are returning. And, to cap it all, five blocks to the north, Starbucks, the Gap, and Disney have set up shop.

I am early for an appointment with number seventeen's last tenant. It's amazing that somebody is still there, living in what looks like rubble. The workmen are unperturbed as I walk into the premises and go up the stairs in semi-darkness. The air is thick with dust and I feel it catch my throat. At the top, a diminutive African-American woman, Mary Osborne, greets me, shakes my hand cheerily, and ushers me into a second-floor room. It's barely twelve feet by twelve feet, though the tall ceilings make it feel less claustrophobic. It's filled with her modest possessions: a small television, a radio, a refrigerator, clothes stacked up on a single bed, all covered with plastic wrapping—"to protect everything from water leaks and the mess," Osborne laments. In one corner there's a cheap bookshelf, upon which I spot Alex Haley's *Roots*, a biography of Malcolm X, several Bibles, a bulky biography of Queen Elizabeth II, and, curiously, a paperback by a certain Donald Trump.

Osborne has a mop of black curly hair, with only a couple of gray strands. She's fifty-four, yet looks ten years younger. She moved to New York at the age of seven and worked once—that was before getting sick. Now she draws public assistance and represents a beleaguered and endangered species in the city. She's a single-room-occupancy (SRO) tenant, somebody who isn't gaining during these boom times, nor is she ever likely to. If anything, Osborne and her ilk are directly threatened by today's thriving economy and buoyant real estate sector.

"I've been here since 1993," she tells me. "I was living at 121st Street until the old owner died and the new one started tearing everything


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down around me." The owner wanted Osborne out of the single room. At first, Osborne refused to budge. Then the owner started "doing harassment." Osborne didn't want trouble, so she gave in and fled. "I wasn't really happy, but a neighborhood friend of mine found me this room. There was nothing better." But after number seventeen's owner died, things started to deteriorate. The latest landlord had big plans for his Harlem property. He would renovate the eleven units, knocking down adjoining walls on every floor, combining rooms, installing new toilets and kitchens, transforming dingy rooms into plush one- and two-bedroom apartments, with rents beginning at $2,000 per month. All tenants—Osborne, a middle-aged African-American man, and three Ecuadoran families—had to vacate, immediately. "It was a Sunday evening, around seven thirty, last October. No warning, no letter, no nothing, just 'boom, boom, boom!' at the door." Osborne was given a week's notice. Seemingly overnight, the other tenants disappeared. Now she is alone. She feels like "the last leaf on a lonely tree. I hope that if the wind blows me off, it blows me off to a special place." Recently, Osborne met one of her former neighbors shopping on 125th Street with her little girl. "They said they're in a shelter. I asked them, 'Why did you move?' 'I don't know, don't know,' she answers. They don't understand the court system," Osborne says. "They don't understand their rights."

SRO UNITS are one of New York's most important reserves of affordable housing for single adults on fixed incomes or with limited resources. Manhattan has more than three-quarters of the city's stock, many in large, pre-war apartment hotels. Harlem has the densest concentration, frequently in lower-rise rooming and town houses. SROs date back to World War I, when ex-servicemen with no families to return to found a grubby haven. The stock also provided cheap and safe shelter for single women, struggling artists, and factory workers, or for anybody else who sought the city's bright lights. Residents still, as then, inhabit one room, with meager furniture, usually sharing bathroom and kitchen facilities with fellow occupants along the hall. Throughout the 1950s, there were around two hundred thousand SRO units in Gotham. During the next three decades, the stock was steadily whittled down. Since the early eighties, decline has been dramatic. As of 1986, only sixty-four thousand units still existed. By 1996, less than forty-seven thousand had withstood the free-market onslaught. Today, it's estimated that fewer than forty thousand survive. Before this decade is done, SROs could well be extinct.

Historically, SRO tenants have had certain rights under New York's Rent Stabilization Code. But there are transiency loopholes, and landlords flout stabilization laws. For example, hotel and rooming house owners can legally charge whatever they want for the first six months of a tenant's occupancy. Thereafter, rent is supposed to be lowered to the stabilized level, and the resident effectively becomes "permanent." Still, in practice, as long as SRO tenants remain ignorant of this law, landlords can—and do—charge what they like. The code, meanwhile, requires that landlords provide a tenant with a Notice of Rights and Duties, a formal contract detailing the precise status of their permanent tenancy and the safeguards protecting them from illegal eviction.

Osborne learned about her rights the hard way. "I'm trying my best to fight for my rights as an SRO tenant," she says, resolutely. "I'm hoping we can work something out, something comparable, because I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place right now." She explains that she gets $215 per month federal shelter allowance, plus a further $68 toward her nine kinds of medication. She's hyperglycemic and has hypertension and high cholesterol. She pays $60 per week for rent, contributing $25 from her disability income. "I don't really live off anything too much. It's been a harsh struggle."

Since last March, it's been difficult for Osborne to pursue her regular reading regime. "Drilling and banging all night," she says. The workmen are busy around the clock, coming in the morning and leaving practically at dawn, with hardly any respite. She can't sleep. "I can't do nothing. They got paint in the bathtub and the toilet is all blocked up and doesn't flush. They even took the toilet seat away. Now I have to go to the store around the corner where they have a bathroom." In November, many of

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Osborne's clothes were damaged by a water leak. The ceiling of her kitchenette, which is about the size of a small closet, caved in after workers labored in the apartment above. There were loud bangs and vibrations, and suddenly, water came gushing though the light fixture, drenching everything. The fire department turned off the water mains and electricity. "Didn't have either all weekend." "There was a rat running around as well," she adds, matter-of-factly, "[that] came in through a hole in the kitchen. He was like a little kitten. So I started walking 'round in boots. I was too scared to even eat or sleep. I could hear him moving like a human being." It was then that she accused her landlord of harassment. Osborne sought guidance from Harlem's Legal Aid Society on 125th Street, which holds a clinic every Tuesday. These days, she says, you have to arrive early to avoid a long wait. The Legal Aid people recommended that Osborne consult the West Side SRO Law Project, a specialized tenant advocacy and advisory organization. Osborne didn't waste time. "They've been very effective at trying to help me."

The Law Project occupies a cramped, ground-floor office on Columbus Avenue between 91st and 92nd Streets in a community center. Outside the entrance, there's a large mural painted by neighborhood kids: two out-stretched hands, one yellow, another brown; the fingers just about make contact. The Law Project, says Terry Poe, one of four tenant organizers, was conceived back in 1981 in response to the alarming decline of SROs and the belief that New York's homelessness crisis could be traced to this loss. On the Upper West Side especially, many owners wanted to convert their large SRO buildings into glitzy condos or upscale co-ops. En route, a lot of tenants lost their heating, hot water, and elevator service, or were strong-armed by thugs and intimidated by drug dealers and prostitutes, who, Poe thinks, were recruited to rid buildings of rent stabilized tenants. The community center felt obliged to intervene and, working with local housing associations and other groups, lobbied the city to preserve precious SRO stock. Out of this agitation came the Law Project, funded by the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD).

Elizabeth Kane, an attorney and the project's director, describes its birth pangs and growing pains. She's adamant in the belief that in the 1970s New York intended to destroy SRO buildings. An amendment to J-51 coding in 1975, for one thing, provided subsidy and tax breaks to any owner or developer who undertook upscale conversion. Ridding the city of SROs, replacing them with higher order uses, seemed to make sense. After all, it brought a lot of money to the city: developers and construction companies hire workers and make healthy profits; landlords reap rewards; communities are usually glad to see scruffy, old, problematical buildings full of problematical people gentrified; and, to top it all, the city claimed that its tax base expanded. "It seemed lovely to everyone," Kane says. "Except for the obvious: if you destroy the housing of your low-income people, where are they to go? In 1981, New York City sort of looked down and said, 'Oh my gosh, we now have this huge homeless population that we didn't have just a few years ago. How did this happen?'" So the city finally began to confront what was already obvious to many. "One of the things we point out to the city every year we go down to City Hall to beg and plead for our funding," Kane says, "is that we're a lot cheaper than homelessness. It costs somewhere around twenty thousand dollars a year to house a single adult in a shelter. This project has been funded at under five hundred thousand a year and prevents a lot of people from becoming homeless. The math is fairly simple: It's a lot more economical to pay us."

Although New York's population grew by 350,000 between 1981 and 1999, it added just 42,000 new rental units. The Reagan administration slashed funding for public housing in the eighties, further exacerbating the situation. With demand far exceeding supply, and with a relatively dwindling stock and low vacancy rate, rents skyrocketed. Since 1975, median rents jumped 33 percent, while median incomes, adjusted for inflation, grew 3 percent. The waiting list for public housing currently tops 130,000 families, and shelters are stretched beyond coping on typical nights. Despite record budget surpluses and eight years of un-


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precedented economic expansion and prosperity, nobody seems concerned about building affordable housing. Poe and Kane concur that New York's steady rightward shift makes their life and job tougher. "It's depressing, it's hard, it's draining," Kane told me. "I feel I expend as much energy, both psychologically and physically, dealing with the bleak political atmosphere that we function in as I do providing services for tenants. [New York mayor Rudolph] Giuliani isn't interested in preserving low-income housing. He's not interested in preserving opportunities for low-income people to live in this city." Kane insists that her clients have more difficulty now with immigration issues and with welfare: "They're not able to get the same benefits, not able to get food stamps, not able to switch to Social Security when it's appropriate. All that makes the housing situation more difficult."

Eighteen months ago, the Law Project and the Sixth District's Democratic councilwoman, Ronnie Eldridge, drafted a more definitive tenant protection bill, which, if it had passed, would have compelled the Department of Buildings (DOB) to halt unauthorized construction work, immediately imposing Stop Work orders. But the proposed measure received a lukewarm reaction in official circles and was swiftly canned. Instead, flimsy harassment laws prevail, and savvy landlords and developers with time and money can easily circumvent them. Since 1983, would-be building converters can obtain a work permit only if they've first gotten a Certificate of No Harassment. The latter involves an official inquiry, determining whether they have a record of harassment in the three years prior to their application. If they're clean, they get a green light. "The mechanism," Kane says, "tries to make it not so economically worthwhile for landlords to harass tenants." Nevertheless, landlords with renovation plans can lie low; wait three years; be obliging about maintenance and service provision; even, as some have, give out Christmas gifts—until, of course, they receive the necessary certificate. "The minute landlords get the Certificate of No Harassment and work permit," Kane argues, "they use the construction itself to try to drive out tenants." She thinks the law should be amended to cover at least a five-year stretch, "and if landlords have a history of harassment elsewhere, this should be taken into account, too." Even when work is carried out illegally, without a permit, it's seldom stopped quickly enough, if it's stopped at all. "A Stop Work order may be issued, but what then?" Kane sighs. "The city doesn't follow up."

According to HPD data, the number of legal building conversions in New York rose from 82 in 1993 to 140 in 1997, affecting 1,683 units as opposed to 568. Figures for shady renovations aren't known, though the West Side Law Project estimates that the number of SRO units illegally converted easily matches the number of legal conversions. Between 1996 and 1997, applications for Certificates of No Harassment grew 40 percent for the city at large and 35 percent for Harlem. Harlem is clearly an untapped reservoir for speculative redevelopment, but it's also a long-standing source of low-income housing. Right now, for 350 or so brownstones in Central Harlem, the tension between these two realities is palpable. These properties (90 percent are likely SROs), face imminent mortgage foreclosure because they're part of a controversial federal loan scheme: the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Rehabilitation Mortgage Insurance (Section 203[k]).

In the beginning, the 203(k) program had an honorable intent: to promote home ownership for poor and moderate-income people and help nonprofits in neighborhood restoration. Bankers and financiers provided mortgages of up to $400,000 toward house purchase and rehab in neighborhoods and for people otherwise deemed risky bets. Under the scheme, HUD simply underwrites all risk. Should the buyer default, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) steps in, guaranteeing the lender's money, plus all incurred costs. In and around the city, there were 134 such loans made in 1996. In 1998, the number exploded to 1,128. Early on, HUD's auditors smelled a rat, rightly suspecting the program of being "highly vulnerable to waste, fraud, and abuse by investors and non-profit borrowers." As it transpired, appraisers got carried away and persistently over-valued property; nonprofits were

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eventually overwhelmed by covert for-profits, while contractors, realtors, and brokers skimmed off exorbitant fees. In a nutshell, the 203(k) program became rich pickings for the wrong sort of people.

The scam now affects Central Harlem, where "mortgage lenders have been aggressively pushing to sell these properties to nonprofits. But what's been typically happening," Terry Poe explains, "is that they've been getting these high mortgages and not putting any money into the building, not doing any rehabilitation. Now, the banks and mortgage companies are foreclosing." Nobody seems to know the true extent of abuse and finagling. Poe worries that this is "a huge scandal," and it "may potentially have a major impact on SROs in Central Harlem." One broker has already sent out a list of 114 properties fresh on the market. "I guess all the mortgage lenders must have gotten together," Poe says, "and hired brokers to try to get rid of the buildings before they're foreclosed on. . . . If the buildings go to auction or a receiver is appointed, it's going to be very serious for the tenants. Either somebody with absolutely no interest in running the building as housing will buy them, milk them, and sell them again. Or somebody will buy them up, try to push the tenants out, renovate them, and sell them for more money." Whatever the case, the 203(k) program has been instrumental in property flips in Harlem, increasing the pace of gentrification. SRO dwellers must now endure its discontents.

The Law Project is bracing for a wholesale emptying out of SRO buildings in Central and Lower Harlem. Just this past year, many more residents with inquiries, grievances, and requests for help—Mary Osborne included—have come in. In response, a blitz organizing and outreach campaign is currently in motion. The project is scrutinizing Certificate of No Harassment applications; assessing trends in Harlem; and pressuring city agencies to prosecute where harassment is ongoing, ensuring that landlords don't find harassment a simple and efficient method to expel low-income dwellers. But with their resources stretched thin, Kane and her staff need to muster broader community support; above all, they need SRO residents themselves to join the effort to halt the speculation, the demolitions, the emptying outs—to fight for justice.

On the Upper West Side, below Harlem, SRO tenants face another enemy. Elizabeth Kane identifies it as an emerging and threatening trend: "Gentrification," she explains, "had slowed down in the 1980s. Now . . . it's not gentrification for people in the city. It's not converting an SRO to serve yuppies with high incomes. Now it's tourism. The tourist boom is the driving force." Indeed, an unprecedented 36.7 million tourists and business travelers flocked to the Big Apple last year, second only to Orlando, Florida, and 11 percent more than the previous year. Fifteen billion dollars were spent at hotels, stores, restaurants, and cultural attractions, which, in turn, generated $2.9 billion in local, state, and federal tax revenues and provided 275,000 jobs. Guest rooms continue to sell at ultra-high prices: last year's average was $204 a night, the most expensive in the nation and double what it was a decade ago.

There are downsides to this boom, needless to say. Greater vehicular and pedestrian congestion is one. Another is the danger of over-speculation and over-building, a lesson learned from the slump of the early 1990s, when hoteliers and investors got burned. (But a crash might help SRO tenants by forcing rents down and releasing displacement pressures.) A third, more profound contradiction confronts the city's planners and politicos: New York's extrovert, cosmopolitan nature—open to the world, a magnet for travelers—is increasingly threatening its neighborhood character, its traditional hometown status, its role as a place where ordinary folks eke out a living.

Overlooking Broadway is 222 West 77 Street, a big pre-war apartment building that embodies this latter tension. In a sense, the building's fortunes over the years mirror the changing fortunes of the Upper West Side and New York itself. In 1976, the building, known as the Benjamin Franklin Hotel, was a somewhat shabby and cheap residential hotel, full of single-room occupants, working people who were just about making out. After a while, the SRO became the Broadway American. Today, after a costly facelift and rehab, the old Broad-


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way American is the new "On the Ave," a mid-priced, short-stay boutique hotel, with rooms beginning at $240 per night.

Leah Porter, a sixty-three-year-old white woman, is one of seventy or so remaining SRO tenants at the hotel. She lives in a prim, eighth-floor, oblong room that measures about fifteen feet by eight feet. It's decorated with floral curtains, and her divan bed acts as a sofa by day. As we sip iced tea and talk, Porter's neighbor, Grace Gross, an African-American woman maybe ten years Porter's junior, joins us. "We've had a lot of different owners," Porter tells me. "But when I first moved into the building, one elderly gentleman owned it and you had to be interviewed to make sure that you were respectable and. . .took care of yourself." She says the neighborhood was frayed and the building shabby—but clean and safe. "It was a little oasis of peace and safety and tranquility. It was a godsend, a lifesaver for me." Back then Porter paid $36 a week, sold cosmetics, and tried to pick up the pieces of a failed marriage. She pays $239 per month now, suffers from depression, no longer works, and has received disability assistance and food stamps since 1988.

Gross arrived in 1981 and paid more, but with a steady bank job it was affordable. She still works for a bank and pays $430 a month. (Her room, I discover later, is bright and attractive, about twice the size of Porter's, full of plants, and has a lovely bird's eye view over Broadway.) "The place was shabby," Gross admits, "but very clean and quiet, and there was always somebody down at the desk. If they didn't know you, they would stop you, ask you who you were and where you were going." "Unfortunately," Porter chips in, "the building started to get run down." After the old owner died, new owners "kept breaking the bathroom windows in the winter. We'd put cardboard up and they'd rip it down. We'd never have heat or hot water," Porter remembers. "It was bleak. They eventually had their license taken away and could no longer operate." In 1980, another landlord took control. "They wanted to sell and wanted us out. They wanted richer people in. But we told them we weren't moving, that we had no place else to go. So they started putting in prostitutes and drug dealers and dangerous people, starting using terror tactics. Amsterdam Avenue wasn't that safe, neither was Columbus, especially after dark." Porter says things in and around her building weren't very nice. "The point was that it wasn't supposed to be as nice. We were supposed to leave."

As Porter and Gross stayed put, the environment around them became steadily tonier. Up and down Broadway, between 72nd and 112th Streets, former SRO buildings have steadily been picked off. "It was a neighborhood once," Gross reminisces. "Now, it's yuppie-duppie, $2,000-plus rents. I always felt that when I went outside I was walking with people who were like me, who were just getting the rent check written every month. Now, when you go out you know it's not like that. You feel like you're an outsider. It's so money oriented. If it was before, you didn't feel it. It's another world out there now." Porter and Gross can't hide their nostalgia. "Sometimes," says Porter, "you feel like you're on Fifth Avenue, you can't walk on the streets, they're so crowded. It's become so posh." Being an SRO tenant once meant independence, Porter laments. "It was wonderful. This used to be a residential neighborhood. It was our home and they're taking it away."

Judgment Day arrived at the Broadway American in April 1997, when an ambitious New York real estate investment company, Property Markets Group (PMG), bought the building for $20 million. Immediately, PMG committed itself to a $12 million overhaul of the grossly "undercapitalized" property. Citylife Hotel Group, a division of PMG, would run operations and manage the new creation. By the following January, the rehab had begun at the top and was working its way down fast. In early March, it had reached Porter and Gross's floor. "They wanted us to move downstairs. They said they'd give us a larger room with a bathroom."

But Porter and Gross were suspicious. The rooms they were offered faced an alley and were darker. It was really a ploy to edge them out, Porter believes. "Some of our friends on the eighth floor moved. We pleaded with them not to go. Every single one of them since has said, 'We should have listened to you.' It's like it's three different hotels now. There's us, the tourists, and the people downstairs." For two

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years, there was often no hot water or heating; the floor was gutted; dust and debris were everywhere; and there was endless thumping and drilling, even on weekends—especially on weekends. Builders blocked up the windows, submerging everything in eerie darkness. "PMG made the construction as loud as possible, as dirty as possible, with as much harassment as possible," Porter recalls. "They really never thought that the few of us who stayed on would be able to stick it through." " 'On the Ave,' yeah, sure," Gross jokes. " 'On the Verge,' more like."

At the Broadway American, Elizabeth Kane believes, "They were clearly trying to get tenants out and went about it in a very brutal fashion. Tenants lived through really horrible conditions and didn't cave. At their request, we initiated a civil suit against the landlord for damages based on the 'warranty of habitability.'" The case against PMG "is plodding its way very, very slowly through the court system, in part because the landlord would like it to take as long as possible. What will come from that suit we have yet to see. Hopefully, there will be some real compensation." PMG did actually receive a Certificate of No Harassment for its conversion of On the Ave. Since then, it has become one of Manhattan's most aggressive hotel converters. At the Commander Hotel, dozens of harassment charges and grievances were filed against the company in early 1998. In fact, these allegations, subsequently substantiated, helped scuttle PMG's activities at the Allerton Hotel. HPD denied PMG a Certificate of No Harassment in February 1999. Company executives pressed city housing officials to overrule the verdict—unsuccessfully. Now, the hotel management sits out a three-year ban at the Allerton, able only to carry out renovations that don't alter unit numbers or dramatically reconfigure rooms.

"We can only try to stop the floodgates from opening," Terry Poe concedes, "[and] force landlords to retain some rooms for permanent residents while they're allowed to convert others into tourist use." But, for the foreseeable future, such defensive maneuvering is as good as it gets. Many displaced tenants will doubtless go to live with family or friends, if they have any; some, if they're lucky, may find alternative cheap housing; many more will likely end up in shelters; and a few will find their way onto the street. One day, Poe and his Law Project colleagues hope for a real political commitment of resources toward affordable, single-person accommodation, probably not SROs, but studio apartments with kitchenettes and bathrooms. For the time being, "we see no commitment. . .to any sort of program that benefits poor, working-class people in this town."

As I leave the Law Project's offices, I glance back at that colorful mural, those two almost-clasping hands. Then I remember Mary Osborne, sitting in her little room in Harlem, amid the rubble, wondering where she might go next, thinking about whose hand she might clasp. Something she said lingers with me. She'd cited from her Bible, from 2 Kings, chapter 7, the parable of "lepers at the city gate." Four leprous men are deliberating. "Why should we sit here until we die? If we decide to go into the city, we shall die there, for there is famine in the city. If we remain here, we shall die too." Of course, the lepers have really nothing to lose, sort of like Osborne. So they decide to go to the camp of the Aramaeans. "If they spare us, we live; if they kill us, we die." The lepers can't know the outcome in advance. As it happens, when the men reach the camp, no one is there. They eat, drink, and clothe themselves. Their activism somehow saved them; it would have saved them even if they had lost. Osborne finds inspiration here: "I, too, am entering the city," she said. "We SRO tenants are lepers at the gate of Giuliani's New York. Why should we sit here and die?" ●

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# Kilroy in Dresden

**Nicholas Howe**

THE GRAFFITO made famous by American GIs as a marker of place, of having been somewhere, stands rewritten as the name for a travel agency on Zellescher Weg in Dresden: "Kilroy Travels." This phrase, printed in English over a stylized map that depicts no recognizable part of the world, says much about the story of Dresden in the recent past. The world changes. Kilroy is no longer here or there, leaving graffiti scars behind. He's out of town, on the road, somewhere else. So says the sign on the *Reisebüro*. He's everywhere and become anyone. Or, more complicated, he's become anyone in this city that until a few years ago was nestled deep in East Germany (GDR).

The numerous travel agencies in ex-GDR cities are continual reminders of the changes worked in 1989 by East Germans who went as tourists to other former communist bloc countries like Czechoslovakia or Hungary and, from there, made their way to the West. Every travel agency with posters for Asia and the Mediterranean, with low fares to London, Los Angeles, or Bangkok, marks out the changes of a decade, the possibility of unrestricted and cheap travel.

To see Kilroy the wandering GI celebrated in Dresden seemed odd, even disturbing, in the summer of 2000. For what an American brings to this city is above all the story of the firebombing of February 1945 or, more likely, Kurt Vonnegut's version of it in *Slaughterhouse Five*. Any American who read books as a kid in the late 1960s or early 1970s knew that story. Or at least this one thought he did. That the firebombing of the largely non-industrial city of Dresden—filled with thousands of civilians and war refugees fleeing Russian troops as they advanced through the eastern parts of the Reich—was an anticipation in Europe of the atomic bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. That it was proof Americans and their allies, waging what they believed to be a noble crusade, were fully as capable of war crimes as those they fought against. Anyone looking at Dresden in 2000, though, needs also to remember Hermann Göring's visionary dream of destroying London from the air with incendiaries rather than high explosives. And with that remembering comes the sense that Vonnegut was not writing about Dresden in 1969 so much as he was writing about the cold war and the napalm bombings of Vietnam. History opens the way to allegory, one place morphs into another, the burden of war guilt looks for some moral repose. But being somewhere means that you have to separate history and allegory for a time so you can begin to see the place as it stands today.

The sections of the city built after World War II can be identified from their poured-concrete buildings, known in German as *Plattenbauten*; they are most visible as you emerge from the train station and look across the plaza on Pragerstrasse. Equally visible, once you wander around Dresden, is the fact that not all of the city was leveled or burned to the ground in 1945. The center of Dresden was devastated by explosions and fires; estimates of the dead run from 50,000 upward to at least 135,000. The exact count will never be known because many of the dead were refugees on the move. The firestorm covered as many as eight square miles at the city center. Elsewhere in Dresden, however, many buildings survive to show that it had been an elegant, wealthy city through the early decades of the twentieth century. As I walked along Zellescher Weg and wondered where K. might be after all these years, I realized that his trademark "Kilroy was here" meant that he had seen a place for him-

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self because he had been there. Writing it on a wall was a signature of experience, of becoming less of an innocent abroad. Nowhere does that seem more necessary than in Dresden.

DRESDEN HAS the melancholy feel of history about it because so much of the cityscape demands to be read for its stories of the past. Consider first the sector where the bombs fell; and where then the GDR built a Stalinist dreamscape along Pragerstrasse of prefabricated apartments and hotels to announce a new era; and where now retail stores bear the familiar names of German and American capitalism. The monuments of Dresden that speak to the world of high culture were in this zone of destruction: the now rebuilt Semper Opera, the museums in the Zwinger Palace, and the Frauenkirche. To trace the sad, imperial lineage of history, one can look at the mural of Saxon princes first created in 1876 and then redone in 1907 with gold and black ceramic tiles from the Meissen Porcelain factory. Running the length of a city block, this procession of rulers leads up to, but ends safely before, the twentieth century. Melancholy also touches old houses and villas in the city: many reconstructed, some under renovation, others continuing to decay. Some have lost their vivid colors, especially the yellow known as Hapsburg, and now are reduced to brownish-gray stucco. The faded lettering of old signs, usually in a script that belongs to the 1920s and 1930s, can sometimes be made out on them.

How does a place recover from its own history? The story about Dresden, as a student there told me, is that it was destroyed twice. First when it was burned from the air in 1945, and then when it was built from the ground up in the 1960s and 1970s.

Walking through Dresden in hot summer weather, I could see it trying to recover the glory it had in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when it was a city of luxurious villas. It had been a place where Canaletto came to paint in the late 1740s; it was then, in the customary phrase, Florence on the Elbe, a city of cultivation and wealth. Canaletto's paintings of the market square and of the River Elbe are so much a part of the place's history that they were used to guide the reconstruction of the city after 1945. They still hang in the collection of old masters in the Zwinger, though visitors today are likely to rush past them as they seek out Vermeer's "Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window." This is the painting Swann wanted to visit so he could write his book on Vermeer. That he never gets to Dresden is Marcel Proust's reminder that Swann is a Parisian aesthete content to stay in his cocoon rather than a tourist on the worldwide culture circuit. In other words, he was not at all like those who walk through the downtown of today's Dresden.

For that is how Dresden seems to be marking its place on the evolving map of a new Germany. As it returns to capitalism, the city finds its best source of investment for the future is its past. The survival of an older Dresden—with its villas, opera house, museums—gives the current version of the city a means to establish itself in post-*Wende* Germany, unlike so many other places in the old GDR. None of this means that Dresden has been spared the problems of racism and neo-Nazi violence that have erupted more visibly in other, formerly East German cities. It simply means that Dresden distances itself from such manifestations or, at least, succeeds better in distracting the foreign visitor from them.

Dresden is one of the few eastern cities other than Berlin that West Germans will visit. Baroque architecture, Vermeer, expensive opera tickets that sell out months in advance—these mark Dresden as a site of traditional culture in ways difficult to find elsewhere in the reunified state. The GDR years seem to have frozen the buildings. They remained, darkened by coal soot, but still there, so that now what catches and holds the eye is almost always from before 1900. Dresden stands today as the contrary to Berlin, the city of the ever-recurring new. In time, I suspect, even the sad buildings of communist-era Dresden that stretch along Pragerstrasse will take on a nostalgic charm, and not just for those who have their reasons to lament the passing of the GDR. Something about the city's setting in the bend of the Elbe seems to slow one's sense of time, to smooth the edginess of the late twentieth century in this part of the world.


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Work continues on the Frauenkirche Nicholas Howe

Dresden is certainly not building monuments to the passing of the twentieth century, as is Berlin, with its grand constructions by the likes of Daniel Liebeskind and Frank Gehry. Instead, it is rebuilding, restoring, refurbishing, always returning. At a glance, the horizon lines of Berlin and Dresden can look the same because both are punctuated by construction cranes. But as you study what these cranes are doing, two different cities emerge. Berlin is creating a monumental version of itself that verges on the grandiose scale Adolf Hitler wanted for his capital after the final victory; and Dresden is artfully restoring itself by honoring past models for creating a decorous urbanscape. Each city has chosen its era: Dresden before 1900, Berlin after 1989. That these are as much historical allusions as stylistic choices says something telling about how each presents itself so as to evade the twentieth century.

What a visitor cannot evade in Dresden's cityscape is a huge cube of scaffolding, perhaps eighteen or twenty stories high, that enwraps the Church of our Lady, the Frauenkirche. From it will emerge a rebuilt church. Across its front it displays a huge banner proclaiming reconciliation: "*Brücken bauen / Versöhnung leben*" ("Build bridges/Live in Reconciliation"). Bombed flat, its surviving pieces of stonework numbered and meticulously stored for years in open-sided sheds, its ruins a continuing reproach—that is the politically laden legend of the Frauenkirche. This summer, a concert was held in its reconstructed crypt to raise funds for a new synagogue in Dresden. A moment of ecumenism, an act of ritual atonement for the crimes and horrors of the past, an acknowledgment that all suffered—one can easily summon forth these phrases of reconciliation. And of erasure. For that all seems too easy, too much a ritualized gesture of our post-everything time to accept so quickly.

I gave money to the synagogue but not to the church, partly because I know that Americans, in the shadows of Vonnegut, feel so guilty about Dresden they will contribute generously to the Frauenkirche. But more, I did so because these acts are not as symmetrical as they are made to seem. The church is being rebuilt out of fragments cynically preserved by the GDR

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government as a pile of rubble so it could present this act of destruction as overwhelming proof of capitalist evil. The synagogue is being built new because nothing survives to rebuild. Here, to rebuild and to build are not the same. The first is an act of pious recovery; the other is creation from nothing. The rebuilt Frauenkirche will take its place with the monuments of old Dresden: the reconstructed Semper Opera, the Zwinger Palace, the other state buildings. In its late-twentieth-century modernism, the synagogue will stand alone in a narrow site wedged in at the edge of downtown. Whatever Jewish community gathers there will quite literally occupy marginal space.

THE INFLUX of West German businesses on Pragerstrasse—the showplace of the old communist regime—is another act of physical rebuilding and thus of historical rewriting. These businesses run from elegant department stores with luxurious food halls to small shops where teenagers buy clothes they'll wear for a few months and then forget. Here and there scattered around the shopping district are fiberglass lions, about life-size, painted in bright colors. These lions, representing the heraldic animal of Saxony, are a touch of whimsy in a cityscape of poured concrete. Small groups of German tourists amused themselves by posing with the gold lion set in front of the Wempe jewelry store with its prominent logo for Cartier. Dresden seems to have rediscovered the possibility that a city can be a place for satisfying all sorts of desires.

Among these stores, what seemed most beautiful to me was an improvised stand of crates and boards tucked away under the edge of a gray concrete building scarred with graffiti. Its shelves were flooded with the bright colors of fresh fruits and vegetables: yellow lemons and bananas, purple plums and eggplants, red berries. It was evidence of life's abundance, a cornucopia unimaginable fifteen years ago. The crates labeled Dole and filled with imported pineapples were a sure sign that the borders had been opened, and American agribusiness had found another market.

In the heat of June, Dresden seemed a city without shade. Its large, open spaces—some from the GDR, some from long before—gave a sense of being exposed to wind and rain and sun. Along its streets, yellow trams and buses added a pulse of color. The liveliest part of Dresden I saw was not a ceremonial space but rather the student neighborhood during a Saturday afternoon street fair. Instead of gold lions and fast-food places, there were crafts for sale, beer stands, sausages being grilled, a cheerful skateboard shop on Böhmische Strasse called "FUCKYOU TOO," and strange segues of music from techno-pop to folk ballads that emerged as you went from block to block.

Young people walked around in the regalia of the late twentieth century: tattered jeans, livid tattoos, metal poking through skin, electric-colored hair. The worthy locals were all there to check out the scene, some to enjoy being shocked, others no doubt to confirm their suspicion that German youth had been served better by the old regime. Here the buildings dated from before World War II; if they had been fixed up at all, it was with the improvised wit of the streets: bright colors on the walls of the inner courtyards, little shops offering heavy earthenware pottery and weavings, the occasional spray-painted slogan. Here the shabby, worn-out buildings, some not painted or repaired since the 1920s or 1930s, came to seem welcoming amid the lives of young people free to express themselves as they wished. Even if that expression meant being something as sweetly clichéd as a multi-studded, green-haired slacker with a taste for mechanical European rap music.

At the campus center of student life in Dresden, the Technische Universität, the kiosks were plastered with bright orange posters for "*Die größte Party der TU*" ("The biggest party at TU"), with music by "FURY/ intheslaughterhouse," "THINK ABOUT MUTATION," "natural born hippies," and "BIONIC MICROPHONES." All the bands had English names, a tacit gesture toward the non-native sources of the music and the international culture of the students. These names spoke with more than a little unease about what it might mean to be entering adulthood in Dresden in 2000: echoes of the 1960s (slaughterhouse, hippies) mixed with an ambivalence about the future (mutation, bionic),


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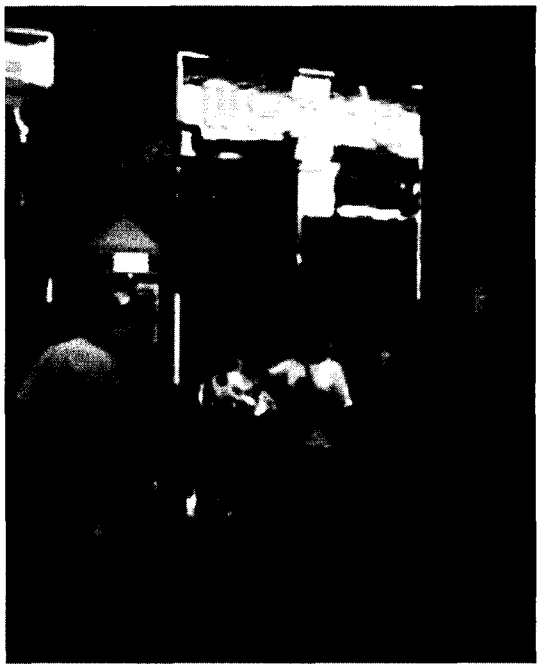
or so it seemed to me. I liked the wit, though, even the elegance of self-assertion in a foreign language. Another poster announced, in a clever pun, "DEKAdance." But it sounded to me like more than a pun, for that word had been a favorite adjective of Fascists and communists alike for denouncing those who lived outside the accepted norms of belief and style.

These signs and their forms of self-invention were all the more engaging when set beside the newly wealthy Dresdeners who cruise the chic shopping neighborhoods of the Neustadt in expensive cars. Watching the finest products of German automotive engineering parade up and down reminded me of nothing so much as small-town America. The cars were different—burnished Porsches and BMWs, rather than customized Mustangs and low-rider Chevy pickups—but the scene had the same feel about it of too much horsepower and no place to go, of people trapped in a familiar, provincial place.

*"Geschichte und Schwermut"* or "History and Melancholy" is the title of a section in Elias Canetti's 1977 memoir *The Tongue Set Free*. I was reading it, as well as his two later volumes of memoirs, while I was in Dresden. These books memorialize a German-speaking Jewish culture that flourished for a time across the heart of Europe—in Vienna, Zurich, and Berlin—and then met its end with the rise of Nazism. Canetti never mentions Dresden. It was not his kind of city in the early part of the century; it was not a place where the new was making itself felt. But the experience of being in Dresden in the summer of 2000 took on some form for me when I encountered his phrase *"Geschichte und Schwermut."* Victor Klemperer's diaries have made Dresden the most intimately known German city of the Nazi period and the Holocaust, but I could not help feeling that I learned something different about what Dresden had been like from Canetti's silence.

The melancholy of Dresden endures and now seems part of its allure for tourists. As I walked through the heart of Dresden, around the museum, I saw racks of postcards for sale on the streets. Many of them have brightly colored images of the obvious sights that are meant to prompt a cheerful message on the reverse to friends and family back home: "Having a great time. Wish you were here." But there are also many postcards made from old black-and-white photos taken of Dresden immediately after the bombing. They are unsparing in their images of destruction: collapsed buildings, huge piles of rubble, isolated human figures amid the wreckage. Some of these photos were taken on the exact spot where one looks at them as postcards some fifty-five years later. Who is supposed to buy them? To whom do you send such images? What do you write on the reverse: "I wasn't here. (signed) Kilroy"?



Fiberglass lions dot the cityscape Nicholas Howe

There are occasional reminders in Dresden that it was once a city of porcelain; elegant shop windows display services of new china, with each item bearing an impossibly high price tag. Several hundred Deutsche marks for a single teacup tells you that this is no longer the workers' paradise. To parody the fashionably ironic terms of the more sophisticated guidebooks, Dresden is a place of contradiction. It is the home of porcelain so fine it has become a standard of delicacy; it is the site of an incendiary bombing so calculated it has become a metaphor for the mass destruction of aerial warfare. The two are linked by a degree of heat sufficiently intense to transform basic elements. The similarity is meaningless, how-

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ever, more a writer's stretching for a clever conceit than a revealing insight about the place. But the attempt to find some such similitude says something worth considering, if not about the place itself then about those looking at it. For Dresden is a city that evokes discordant memories and extreme responses.

THE BOAT TRIP down the Elbe as far as Königstein, some twenty kilometers from the Czech border, is one of the rituals of tourism in Dresden. The boats that make the run are either newly restored paddlewheel steamers from the nineteenth century or high-tech euro river cruisers that make you think of heavy meals and too many drinks. Here, on the Elbe, you can choose the past or the future. As the boat leaves Dresden, it makes its way past vineyards and villas on the north bank. It passes first the elegant suspension bridge known as the Blaues Wunder or Blue-Wonder, from the fact that its original green paint turned bluish a few months after it was finished. And then it passes the Schillergarten, which the poet Johann Schiller frequented because of the landlord's beautiful daughter. Some of the villas are true palaces, with elaborate gardens and cut-stone walls terracing down to the river. There are a few barges chugging along, as well as the occasional speedboat or scull with rowers. Along the bank, the old roads run, busy now with cars and bicyclists out for fun on a beautiful day. Leaving Dresden, you see a landscape formed mainly of low hills, but the closer you get to the border, the stonier and craggier the terrain becomes until you appreciate why the Germans call it "Swiss Saxony."

On the Sunday morning in June when I took the trip, the boat was full of West Germans, many from Bavaria. They drank coffee and beer, admired the scenery, snapped photos of each other, played cards and petted their dogs, and got off at one charming town or another for lunch. Among them sat an old woman who told my friend that she had a year-pass for the boat and took the trip most weekends. As a young woman she had hiked along the river and the cliffs above it. Now, she rode the boat. Her slow, patient viewing of the scene made me think about the rituals of internal travel, of moving through a native landscape much loved. She must have been born sometime around 1925, so the valley of the Elbe was most likely the only one she had been able to travel for many years of her life. From 1939 to 1989 her chances for foreign travel would have been severely limited. And the tourist boats along the Elbe had only been put back in service in the early 1990s. Turning the woman on the boat into a parable of how one can live in a time and place with few chances for mobility was almost too tempting. Traveling in place, looking again and again at a familiar scene—that was what her gaze suggested. This kind of experience may not offer the thrill of the new, the encounter with the other that we glamorize as travel; nor can it easily provide the challenge to a totalitarian regime that comes from seeing how others live elsewhere. But this traveling within a familiar place does offer the freedom of seeing for oneself, of watching a place over time. Within the larger dislocations of her era, the old woman on the boat had lived long enough to know cheap and easy travel arranged by one *Reisebüro* or another.

The boat trip was relaxing because it was so slow, perhaps ten kilometers an hour; its nineteenth-century pace suited the scene. In the landscape were old villages and old castles like the great fortress at Königstein; all from before the twentieth century. Among the boats on the river were restored steamers. The river seemed, amid these signs, to flow backward in time, or at least it let one's mind drift backward. If rivers have long been the familiar metaphor for the passing of time, for the sense that an event occurs in a unique moment never to be repeated, they also provide ways to go back in history. Traveling upstream, against the ceaseless flow of time that deceives us into treating all events as unique, is to learn about a place and its topography. The route set by the Elbe is old and is paralleled by roads and railroad lines. Stone from the riverside cliffs was quarried centuries ago for the royal palace in Copenhagen; then it was floated downriver to Denmark. For a brief time after World War I, Czechoslovakia had a free port on the North Sea near Hamburg; the Elbe was its lifeline from within landlocked eastern Europe. River routes obey the patterns of topog-


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raphy. They are like the established caravan routes that followed the lay of the land when travel was by foot or animal.

A MODERN CARAVAN route ran outside the university building in Dresden where I taught. Highway 170 led directly to Prague and points beyond; as it went through the south of Dresden, it ran along Bergstrasse. This route was the metaphoric "door to the east" from Germany and suggested why it was that Dresden had once been a wealthy city. Calling this stretch of road a highway would be an exaggeration. It is, in fact, a narrow city street hemmed in by university buildings and clogged with huge tractor-trailers carrying goods. As its name says, the street is on a hill, and all day and into the night, you hear the sound of trucks shifting gears as they go up or down. Sometimes the traffic gets too heavy, and an accident happens. One morning, a bus from the Prague-Copenhagen Express rear-ended a car waiting at a red light. Students told me that such accidents happen all the time along this stretch of road, but what struck me as wonderfully surprising, as a sign of the year 2000, was that there should be an express running regularly between Denmark and the Czech Republic. Roads replace rivers but connections can still remain.

Along Highway 170 ran trucks and buses with markings from Thessaloniki, Budapest, Brno, Moldavia, Sofia, Vilnius. I spent an hour or so photographing trucks along this route to catch their caravan markings:

Rosner Spedition / Jumbotransporte:
Poland<—>Deutschland<—>Tschechien
Tatai Trans / Hungary
Glaverbel / Czech
N&K Spedition Denmark
EURO-Holz Ihr Schwedischer Holzpartner
mit Sitz in Zentraleuropa
Metuva—Vilnius Vokietoja—Mainz-Kastel
UPS Weltweiter Zustelldienst
Kapos Kamion International Transport

Each truck was following the route of its time, reestablishing old lines of continuity between this part of Germany and the Slavic regions of Europe. In an hour or less, the trucks would be at the Czech border and all that lay beyond. When the bypass for the new autobahn around Dresden is finished in a few years, Bergstrasse will no longer be clogged with long-distance trucks forcing their way through the middle of a university. That traffic will become a memory of the 1990s, of the decade that restored free passage across borders to this part of the world.

Although that flow of traffic is the visible story of the moment for Dresden, the one that kept coming back to me after I left shaped itself around the old woman on the boat. She was dressed for all weather: sweater, coat, hat tied under her chin with a ribbon, stout shoes. She had her coffee and cake with great pleasure as she looked with youthfully clear, blue eyes at the landscape where she had spent her life. The story I invented for her was not just that she had lived through the tumultuous years of the last century, not just that she still seemed wonderfully engaged with the world around her, but also that her persistence in that place was a warning against generalizing too easily about epochal historical change and its irreversibility. Or its inevitability. And yet I cannot really know what she thought as she looked at the landscape. Perhaps she mourned for a lost world; perhaps she celebrated the changes of the last decade. There is, I see from a distance, no reason to idealize her, though there is every reason to remember that no traveler can share her sense of the place and its history. It is the traveler's luxury to visit a place and proclaim it as the future that works or, just as easily, to cancel its past with a phrase. It hardly matters either way, because the traveler always moves on to somewhere else. Meanwhile, the woman on the boat, watching the river flow through the landscape, stays and looks. ●

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while they clear-cut our forests
and drill for oil in wildlife refuges,
and let's spend more of our tax money
on making missiles,
and let's not worry about poverty and
underpaid public school teachers,
let's have the government
promote Christianity to cure our social ills,
and let's stop abortions
by confining them to back alleys and
let's give the surplus to the rich.**

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# Memo

## To: Those Who Supported the Nader Campaign
## From: Todd Gitlin and Sean Wilentz
## Re: The Obvious

So HERE we are in the Bush II era. No small thanks to Antonin Scalia—and you. If there is a sourness in the air, like the embittered days of 1969 or 1981, there's good reason. Much of the ground lost to the right in recent decades after the left and liberals divided—especially the ground lost under Ronald Reagan in the 1980s—has never been regained. Repeat, never: not in twenty to thirty years—not on labor policy, not on the environment, not on income and wealth inequality, not on support for military goons in poor countries.

The ground to be lost by George W.'s victory is likely to stay lost. How does it feel?

For months, you and your candidate peddled the old nostrum that Democrats and Republicans are essentially the same—two names for one entitity, Republicrats. How any thoughtful person could still think that the differences are negligible boggles the mind.

Consider the issues:

*Global warming?* Gore and the Democrats know it is happening, Bush isn't sure,and many Republicans think it is a hoax. Gore wanted a tax on fossil-fuel energy—a tax that was blocked by Republicans and always will be—while Bush governed over the worst air in the country and justified it on the grounds of industrial growth. Gore knows the arguments against oil drilling; Bush looks at Alaska and sees millions of barrels in profits. Gore was and is an environmentalist who makes political deals; Bush is half of an all-oil-company White House tandem. No difference?

*Conservation?* The departing Bill Clinton signed executive orders that will protect fifty-eight million acres of federally owned land from the depredations of the timber, mining, and energy industries. Those historic signatures represented several years of public hearings and bureaucratic preparation—all of which were being completed even while Ralph Nader denounced Clinton as no better and perhaps somewhat worse on environmental issues than his Republican predecessors. Not one grudging word of praise for the Clinton executive orders was heard from Nader or his followers, nor any word of regret, now that President Bush has vowed to roll back those directives and appointed Gail Norton to his cabinet.

*The Supreme Court? The Department of Justice?* Even before the election, Bush's favorite high court justices were Scalia and Clarence Thomas. Presumably, after the Florida shenanigans, his estimation of them has soared. And on other counts, he owes the Christian right bigger than big time. He and his buddies folded like a cheap suit when the hard-liners demanded he appoint the fire-eater John Ashcroft over the merely conservative Marc Racicot as attorney general. The Bush Court, one-third of whose membership he might get to appoint, might not repeal *Roe v. Wade*, not quite, not yet, but will surely tilt mightily toward corporate power, against labor, against gun control, against affirmative action.

*The mundane government appointments that shape public life in a thousand ways outside public attention?* The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the Civil Rights Commission, and hundreds of other agencies make crucial decisions, most of them outside the glare of sound-bite-besotted media, affecting every aspect of everyday life. See above. Bush owes the fundamentalists, the union busters, the South Carolina Confederate-flag fliers.

*Labor?* Bush doesn't owe labor a thing—to the contrary. Gore's party has pushed up the minimum wage (not nearly high enough),

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Bush's could not care less. Labor has started to regain strength and morale (if not numbers) because the NLRB has been more hospitable to organizers. Now? The Republican Party has negative interest in organized labor. It will rig what it can for the bosses. That's what Republicans do.

**Poverty? Inequality?** The Republicans practice class warfare from above. The Democrats are divided, but despite inconsistencies, President Clinton is responsible for an earned income tax credit, and finally, belatedly, the appalling inequality between rich and poor is shrinking. Unemployment is low (unprecedentedly so for African-Americans and Latinos).

***Nuclear weapons?*** Bush will try to abrogate the antiballistic-missile treaty. He loves Star Wars. His party crushed the nuclear test ban. Gore was at least budgeable on these issues. Bush lacks even Reagan's nutty antinuclear utopianism.

Then there are the limited (but scarcely unimportant) issues that the candidates actually talked about: the Social Security hoax Bush wants to perpetrate; the Bush tax cut that Puts Billionaires First; affirmative action, which Bush wants to end, not mend; campaign corruption (sorry, "finance"); and the auctioning off of access and bias at which W. is so spectacular that he did not even need the Lincoln bedroom—he could offer an entire government.

IN BACKING Nader, you upheld various myths that are dear to the hearts of many leftists, but that are demonstrably untrue.

**Myth**: A Nader vote was costless because his candidacy created its own constituency, bringing masses hitherto demobilized (and rationally so) out of the woodwork.

**Fact**: Turnout is surely important, especially for unregistered blue-collar voters, but waiting for a rescue mission from suddenly lefty voters is the political equivalent of the beam-me-up wishfulness practiced by millennial cults—and it has the same function. The trouble is, there's no persuasive evidence that large numbers of voters have been staying home because they've lacked a left-wing alternative. That's not the country we're living in.

In fact, Nader picked up the lion's share of his support from voters who would have voted for Gore had Nader not run. CNN has reported that half the Nader vote would have gone to Gore—more than enough to put Gore over the top.

**Myth**: In some states where the polls indicated a lopsided race, Naderites proposed "strategic voting" and urged people to cast their ballots for Nader. It was, they contended, a free vote that would not spoil Gore's electoral vote.

**Fact**: There is no such thing as a free vote. That calculated "strategic" vote was both morally problematic and politically shortsighted. Letting the polls make up your mind for you conditioned a moral choice on the presupposition that the polls were reliable (when in fact several key states were swinging all over the place). It was too little pragmatism, too late, from people who ordinarily despise the pragmatism of Gore supporters. It only encouraged illusions about what Nader might accomplish next time, if only... And in the end, it backfired. In Florida, not thought to be a chief battleground state where Nader would make a difference, Nader's supporters provided Bush with his dubious margin of victory. Had half of Nader's vote nationwide gone to Gore, then Gore's victory in the popular vote would have looked all the more impressive.

**Myth**: A Nader vote was important in order to build up popular support for the Greens so that they could get to 5 percent and therefore receive federal funds in 2004.

**Fact**: Suppose, for the sake of argument, that Nader had won his 5 percent, and the Greens got federal funds in future elections. Then what? On the off chance that the Greens could avoid breaking into warring camps, à la the Reform Party, what they could realistically look forward to is someday becoming, say, an 8 percent party. And then? After at least one term of Republican rule, with its unambiguous passion for big oil, against a nuclear test ban, for Star Wars, against labor organizing, for health maintenance organizations, for kindness toward the Pinochets of the world, and so on, maybe eight years on we get to 9 percent? 11 percent? The odds are for shrinkage, not increase, in a third party. This was, and is, a doomed enterprise. The Constitution is deci-


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sively tilted against it. In parliamentary systems, a single-digit party can win seats, enter governments, make policy—as witness the Greens in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. But in the American winner-take-all presidential system—which is not going away—the payoff of a third-party effort is the chance to be a spoiler again.

Naderites sometimes cite the birth of the antislavery Republican Party in 1854 as the great third-party counter-example in our history. But the early Republicans were not really a third party. They arose only when one of the existing two parties, the Whigs, had completely fallen apart along sectional lines. To imagine that either today's Democrats or Republicans are in the situation of the Whigs is a fantasy.

**Myth**: Voting for a third party contributed to "building a movement."

**Fact**: Claims of this sort are always made by charismatic figures. Never—never—do they deliver. The claim amounts to feel-good rhetoric to rationalize a heady campaign. Tomorrow never comes.

**Myth**: Nader's candidacy, by helping to elect Bush, had the effect of heightening the contradictions in America. With Bush in office, Americans will wake up at last, as they never could have under the anodyne Gore.

**Fact**: The arrogance of this "worsism"—the worse, the better—was chillingly expressed by a Nader voter in Portland, Oregon, interviewed by the *New York Times* shortly before the election: "If Bush gets in, I feel that it might bring things to a head much more quickly. Pollution's going to increase in the short term, but I think that will bring a lot more people into the environmental movement a lot more quickly. Sometimes you've got to hit bottom before you come back up." Notice how the means—"a lot more people into the environmental movement"—has become the end: the hallmark of sectarian politics. Notice the spurious assumption that the masses will rise up if things come "to a head." It didn't happen after Reagan's depredations on the economy and the environment. It won't happen now. As for the Nader movement, it was well-meaning and broad but an inch deep. As Eric Alterman wrote in the *Nation* (where seldom was heard a discouraging word), Nader's "nascent leftist movement has virtually no support among African-Americans, Latinos or Asian-Americans. It has no support among organized feminist groups, organized gay rights groups or mainstream environmental groups. To top it all off, it has no support in the national union movement. So Nader and company are building a nonblack, non-Latino, non-Asian, nonfeminist, nonenvironmentalist, nongay, non-working people's left: Now that really would be quite an achievement."

**Myth**: Nader was no spoiler. Al Gore defeated Al Gore.

**Fact**: Nader's claim that he was not the spoiler is bad faith. Perhaps he knows it, perhaps not. Yes, Gore ran a lackluster, dispiriting campaign (and for all that still won the popular vote). Simple arithmetic shows, however, that despite the poor campaign and despite the Republican thievery, Gore clearly would have won the election had Nader backed off.

NUMBERS ASIDE, there is a deeper force at work, behind the delusion that the masses hanker for radical change that Gore would not give them—a purist approach to politics. This all-or-nothing approach, allergic to democratic contest and compromise, is rooted equally in American self-righteousness and traditional left-wing utopianism. It is as if by venting one's anger, one were free to remake the world by willing it so, despite all of those benighted, recalcitrant people who just happen to live here. Here is the uncomfortable truth: We are condemned to share the Earth with people we dislike, even despise. In a democracy, we are condemned to share power with them. A large party—any large party—is a coalition of interests. Imagine the Democrats away and replace them with a left-wing party, and it would still be a coalition of interests heading for disappointment. The question, in 2000, about the actually existing Democrats was this: how to make them more green, more labor-friendly, less punitive? And the prerequisite—not the guarantee, but the prerequisite—was to vote for Democrats, starting with Al Gore.

"Al Gore cost me the election," Ralph Nader said the morning after at the National

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Press Club. How cute: the smug self-righteousness of a guru. The passion of every sect, as for every profit-obsessed corporation, is to mistake a means for an end. In the end, Nader claims to have established "the fastest-growing third party in America." His stated goal is "To keep the two parties in Washington more honest"—but that is marginality speaking. The objective of politics should be to obtain political power for good causes.

Nader says that the Greens are "the only party that connects on the ground with citizens fighting for justice," but this is to mistake social movements for political forces. This is to forget a truth that we have just seen demonstrated, that more than 95 percent of America is to the right of the Greens. Democracy is not rule by activists, it is rule by the people. Even those who have doggedly, devotedly followed Nader for decades will have a hard time bonding with him now.

The risk of this result was always apparent, and Nader did nothing to suggest that he thought it negligible. At many points, he washed his hands of mere earthly results. Heaven was nigh. His campaign represented "the beginning of the end of the two-party duopoly." His hands would remain clean. Perhaps the risk was really an opportunity—to build the Green Party!

The young among Nader's supporters have been properly disgusted by normal politics and are eager to see something new, fine, and fierce come into the world. They will continue to search for the way to make that desire manifest, as they ought to. Many went to the polls last November not yet knowing what to do and found their minds concentrated. They will see, now, how effective is political action—one way or another.

But most of you reading this don't have the excuse of inexperience. You either remember or know about 1968, with Nixon and five more years of the Vietnam War. And even so, with your eyes fixed on the rearview mirror—the New Deal, the movements of the sixties—you counseled others to make a vote they could be proud of. But the pride you were speaking of preceded an earthly crash.

Moral purists might consider that, if conscience demands responsibility, it is fanaticism that washes its hands of results. Indeed, finger-pointing in every direction but home is the way of normal, stale politics. Rabbi Hillel, Dostoyevsky, Sartre, Gandhi (whom some of the writers among you love to quote in other connections) have all known this central principle: when one chooses, one chooses the world. No alibis.

The claim of conscience without the work of conscientiousness is blindness. ●

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## Ellen Willis Responds

I VOTED FOR Ralph Nader for several intertwined reasons. At a time when both major parties and the culture's conventional wisdom uncritically embrace corporate power and free-market ideology, I felt it was important to support a nationally visible challenge to that consensus. I hoped that getting enough support to qualify for federal funds would help the Green Party to build on the momentum of the Seattle protest and become an influential force in national politics. I don't see electoral politics as the only, or even the primary, arena for movement-building. But in the absence of forceful opposition to the repressively narrow boundaries of what passes for mainstream campaign "debate," those boundaries are seen as defining politics itself: the idea that nothing is possible beyond the most trivial gestures toward dealing with our social problems becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Someone has to get up and loudly, publicly insist that declarations of the end of history are premature, and this time the one with the megaphone was Ralph Nader. Finally—or perhaps first of all—I am convinced that if the left is to revive, it must break from its masochistic, unrequited loyalty to the Democratic Party.

It's this last point, especially, that drives Todd Gitlin and Sean Wilentz berserk: they devote a lot of space to arguing that the Demo-


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crats and the Republicans are not the same. They are banging on an open door, in my case. The two parties are not the same—one is a center-right party, the other a far-right party. And like Gitlin and Wilentz, I'd rather live under the center-right party. Nor do I believe "the worse the better," whatever "a Nader voter in Portland" may think (Gitlin and Wilentz may be adept at seeing differences between Republicans and Democrats, but recognizing distinctions among Nader supporters is not their strong point). On the contrary, I usually vote for Democrats who are running against conservative Republicans—at the same time that I voted for Nader for president, I voted, albeit with little enthusiasm, for Hillary Clinton for senator. Furthermore, Nader was hardly my ideal candidate. Irritating as it is to hear the argument from Eric Alterman, who has made a career of dismissing cultural issues as "identity politics," it's true that despite numerous pleas by supporters, Nader would not stretch himself to connect with constituencies beyond his young-white-guy core. In truth, my vote was as much a matter of weighing tradeoffs and compromises—always the coin of electoral politics—as many Gore votes were. Why then was I willing to risk a Bush victory? Why, for instance, risk the appointment of Supreme Court justices who might overturn *Roe v. Wade*, among other things?

THE BEST WAY to understand my position is to look at the Democrats' modus operandi since the election. We have just been through a campaign in which George W. Bush pretended to be a moderate, lost the popular vote anyway, and stole the electoral vote with the connivance of Republicans everywhere from the Florida state house to the U. S. Supreme Court. The Democrats have half the seats in the Senate and are barely outnumbered in the House, which is enough power to constantly remind Bush of his lack of a mandate and keep him from doing real damage. Instead, they are determined to be statesmanlike, bipartisan, and respectful of the system, which is to say supine. Al Gore discouraged his supporters from getting out in the streets of Florida, while Republicans showed up en masse. He said not a word about the scandalous disenfranchisement of black voters. Black Democrats in the House could not find one senator to join their objection to the Bush electors (not even Paul Wellstone, who then had the gall to editorialize in the *Nation* that Democrats should resist pressure to "operate from the center"). Democratic senators refused to filibuster the Ashcroft nomination, though they could have defeated it, and passed Gale Norton as secretary of the interior without blinking. As I write, Democrats in both houses appear to be folding on tax cuts. I admit I was surprised at how quickly their post-Florida indignation faded, but I shouldn't have been. After all, Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas would not be on the Supreme Court without help from Democrats, and Democrats collaborated in passing Ronald Reagan's ruinous tax cuts (Bill Bradley was even co-author of the 1986 "reforms"). Conservative Republicans hang together, stand up for their beliefs, and police the "moderates" in their ranks, while the Democrats' every impulse is toward compromise and appeasement. If anything, their behavior suggests that they are threatened by the potential power of such mass constituencies as labor, blacks, and women, and would rather lose than risk unleashing it.

There's a conundrum here that Democratic apologists like Gitlin and Wilentz do not address. When Democrats are in power, they move to the right under pressure from Republicans, stiffing their core constituencies in the confidence that the left has nowhere else to go. When they're in the minority, they essentially give up the battlefield and let the Republicans get away with murder. In other words, the Democrats' own spinelessness helps to create the conditions that make liberals and leftists feel compelled to keep voting for them despite the likelihood, if not certainty, of betrayal. This is a recipe for paralysis. It's one thing to lose, another to be structurally trapped in a losing game.

If our sole criterion for political choices is to keep things from getting worse, we will be forever caught in the double bind I've described. This does not simply ensure stalemate. It means that things will get worse; for even when the Democrats rule, the country will continue to drift rightward, if more slowly. The last

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several decades have clearly shown that without a strong left to counter a determined right, the center does not hold. Under Jimmy Carter and Clinton as well as Reagan and Bush *père*, deregulation, devolution of the welfare state, the triumph of the plutocrats, and the erosion of civil rights and liberties—abortion rights included—proceeded as if ineluctable. There is no way to combat this pernicious political dynamic without taking risks. How do Gitlin and Wilentz propose to make the Democrats "more green, more labor-friendly, less punitive" if we reflexively vote for them no matter what they do? The real question is whether it's possible to break out of our present stifling alternatives and create space for a left—or whether any effort to do so is by definition an exercise in thoughtlessness, delusion, irresponsibility, feel-good cultishness, pride, self-righteousness, allergy to democracy, sectarian purism, and moral fanaticism.

Gitlin and Wilentz have a static view of the electorate and the political spectrum. As they see it, 95 percent of Americans are to the right of the Greens, therefore a majority of people must agree with the center-right (at best), therefore the only responsible course for leftists is to vote Democratic. Anything else is "utopian," in their lexicon a synonym for all the above-mentioned malfeasances. What's wrong with this picture? To begin with, tens of millions of Americans are to the left of Al Gore; the Democratic Party could not survive without them and their organizations. Yet they have far less influence on Democratic leadership and policy making than the smaller Christian right has on the Republicans. Gore, rather than making some mild gesture toward the liberal wing of his party, actually went to the *right* to choose a running mate. Would he have even considered appointing the liberal equivalent of John Ashcroft as attorney general? Why is this so obviously out of the question?

I'd say it's because the "center" is not a fixed location—it shifts depending on how hard and how effectively each "end" pulls it. The right is radical and, if you will, utopian, fighting passionately for its belief in untrammeled capitalism and social authoritarianism. Its extreme fringe regularly overreaches and loses, but in the process makes the Bushes and Cheneys look "reasonable," "mainstream," even moderate. (In this vein, some congressional Republicans have demanded even steeper tax cuts than Bush's extravagant figure, inspiring the following headline in the *New York Times* (February 9, 2001): "Happily in the Middle: As Debate Rages About Tax Cuts, Bush Plan Takes on Mainstream Air.") The radical left, in contrast, barely exists as the source of an alternative vision of society, let alone a militant force for promoting that vision. And without a radical left to provide ideas and conviction, liberals are on the defensive, constantly attacked by the right as an irrelevant leftist fringe till they themselves come to believe that they must "move toward the center" to survive. But if they do not have the confidence to fight for their own beliefs, how can they persuade anyone else—and thereby move the center toward *them*?

I believe that by articulating and fighting for a radical and, yes, utopian social vision, it's possible to move people, to change their minds, and at the very least move the center toward the left. That's in part because of my own indelible political experience of agitating for women's liberation in the late sixties, when 99 percent of Americans were to the right of us (including the men of the New Left), and living to see ideas that once seemed outrageously radical become conventional wisdom, taken for granted even by women who won't call themselves feminists. Gitlin and Wilentz also invoke past experience, but their appraisal of the current situation is rooted in a skewed reading of 1968 and its lessons. It's far from clear that Hubert Humphrey would have ended the war, nor could he have reversed the conservative-populist backlash that gave George Wallace 13 percent of the vote. Anyway, the real problem with the radical left of that period was not that it rejected Humphrey, but that it wrote off the American people and succumbed to the solipsistic, destructive fantasy of waging guerrilla war against them in behalf of third world revolutionaries.

The Nader campaign, in contrast, was based on the idea that the hegemonic corporatism espoused by the major parties was


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preventing oppositional ideas from reaching the American people in the first place. In dismissing out of hand hopes that the campaign would attract disaffected nonvoters, Gitlin and Wilentz miss the point: it's not that there is a crowd of ready-made leftists out there, but that people who are bored and alienated by the vacuity of politics as usual may be open to a left critique. Even if they still don't vote, they may start listening. Nader supporters also hoped that he would push Gore to the left, and Gore did respond for a half-hearted nanosecond. I believe Gore's "populist moment" helped him, and would have elected him if he'd had the nerve to persist. Which is to say that Nader undoubtedly gained votes for Gore—perhaps as many as he lost, perhaps even more.

For Gitlin and Wilentz, all this is empty rationalization: Nader was a spoiler, pure and simple. Yet in an election so freakily close, one can second-guess all sorts of decisions that led to small shifts in voting: if Gore had let Clinton campaign in Arkansas, if the Democrats in Palm Beach had been more savvy about ballot design, and so on. In singling out Nader's Florida votes as *the* culprit, Gitlin and Wilentz merely assume what they set out to prove: that although mistakes in strategy by the major parties may be unfortunate, voting for a third party is inherently illegitimate.

Ironically, the tone of their polemic—which I have to say is typical of the anti-Naderites I've heard from—replicates the self-righteous moralism they profess to abhor. Wheeling out the heavy artillery (Gandhi, Dostoyevsky, et al.), they accuse those of us who won't get with their program not only of political error, but of serious character defects. Even the conciliatory "strategic voters" are excoriated for being inconsistent. Besides, they cut into Gore's popular vote (though why that matters I don't know, since the Democrats have so politely refrained from using the popular vote as a weapon). It strikes me that Gitlin and Wilentz protest a bit too much. When they insist that it's all about the Democrats, and only about the Democrats, are they trying to convince us—or themselves? ●

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## Todd Gitlin and Sean Wilentz Reply

LET US TAKE Ellen Willis's argument at its strongest points—something she does not do with ours. The core of her response is that supporting "a nationally visible challenge" to the corporate consensus helps "movement-building," which in turn promotes "dealing with our social problems." But honesty compels her to acknowledge weak links with "may" and "possible," as in, the bored and alienated "may be open to a left critique . . . . may start listening . . .it's possible to move people."

Where is the evidence for this wishful thinking? In a recent *Dissent* article ("Fool's Gold of the Left," Summer 2000), Ruy Teixeira argued persuasively against the fantasy that nonvoters think differently from voters. Willis evades the problem. She does not address Teixeira's arguments, or anyone else's. Instead, she professes faith, nothing more, in a repetition of radical and utopian ideas. We are skeptical about faith-based politics of all stripes.

The largely successful women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s—which benefited from twelve years of Democratic presidencies—is greatly outnumbered by many fervent reform efforts that have failed, especially when Democrats are out of power in Washington.

Willis is dead right that the Democrats have been supine in the first months after the election. We share her outrage. (But perhaps she is not really outraged, because what more could be expected of what she calls a corrupt "center-right" party?) While the Republicans stopped at nothing to slip their stumbling pretender into the White House, the Democratic leadership quivered. They would quiver less if the left mobilized voters, demonstrating political muscle in the Congress—which can be done if we work in the Democratic Party, but simply cannot be done outside it.

Tens of millions of Democrats may stand

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to Gore's left, but disproportionately they live in California, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and a few other states, where they also elect senators and representatives. The others live in the rest of the country. Ergo, to win nationally, the Democrats must be a coalition party. In the 172 years since modern American parties have fought out elections, the Democrats have been able to win two consecutive terms only four times—Andrew Jackson, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, and Bill Clinton. (If we also claim the Republican Abraham Lincoln as a progressive president—and we do—look what happened to him!) This speaks to the weakness of the center-left historically, an unhappy fact that cannot be wiped aside by invoking the great and glorious 1960s. If the Greens were ever a party that could command more than 2 1/2 percent of the vote, they would have to be a coalition party, too.

In the meantime, the practical, material consequences of the Bush election are dreadful for actual people. We itemized some differences. (Willis may think we are banging on an open door so far as she is concerned, but so far as Ralph Nader is concerned, that door is nailed shut.) Telling ordinary Americans that it's necessary for them to suffer while we, the righteous, wait for them to wise up and "build the movement" is contemptuous of the lives of real people—not just in the United States, by the way, but wherever melting ice caps raise sea levels, thanks to an American government directed by oil company executives.

Bush barged into the White House helped by a host of factors—the antidemocratic bullying of the Supreme Court; Jeb Bush, Katherine Harris, and the Republican firm she hired to throw black Florida voters off the registration lists; and the ineptitude of the Democrats, not least their own Palm Beach County election commissioner Theresa LaPorte. But why minimize Ralph Nader's contribution? It was also decisive, as GOP operatives from Karl Rove on down have gleefully pointed out. Willis does nothing to show that Nader and his backers deserve exemption from responsibility—and, in the eyes of *Dissent*'s readers, from shame. ●


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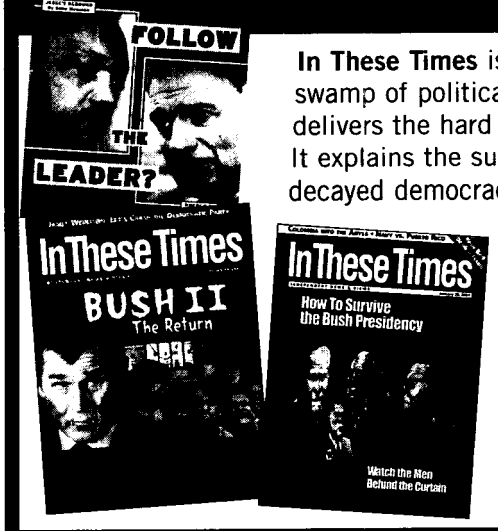


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# A Multicultural Fable

**David Carroll Cochran**

The River District was known as the place to go for dinner. Within a compact area of about six blocks were dozens of excellent restaurants of every variety. Most people would just park on the street and walk around, looking at the menus posted outside, until they found one that struck their fancy. Choices ranged from formal to casual, expensive to cheap, heavy to lighter fare.

The real attraction, however, was the ethnic variety. Dozens of national and regional cuisines were present, thrown together in no particular order, the distinctive music and aromas of each pouring out into the street. The fanciest French restaurant in town was around the corner from a Mexican café with an outdoor patio. Two doors down was a newer Ethiopian restaurant, right next to an Italian one that had been an institution in the neighborhood for years. Its more expensive and trendy rival across the street specialized in North Italian dishes and had the city's most extensive wine cellar. The street that featured three small storefront establishments—Korean, Thai, and Vietnamese—drew those in the mood for Asian food. But getting there meant passing two barbeque joints, one Texas-style, one North Carolina-style, the smell of which frequently drew people in no matter what they came for.

People liked to joke about how the neighborhood made for strange combinations: the Jewish delicatessen catty-corner from the Iranian place, the sushi bar down the street from the Cajun joint serving blackened seafood. The most unique neighbors were probably the Chicago-style steakhouse advertising the thickest cuts in the district and the Indian restaurant featuring strictly vegetarian dishes right next door.

Almost all the restaurants were owned and operated by families that originally came from the region whose food they served. It was their food and they were proud to prepare it and share it. Confused diners could always count on the waiter or waitress, usually a younger relation of the owners, to explain how a dish was prepared. When patrons passed the kitchen, they could hear the cooks yelling at each other in their native language.

The River District had been like this for many years, and most people just took it for granted. But then complaints began to be heard. People said that the individual restaurants in the district were not inclusive enough. The Italian ones served only Italian food, the Chinese ones only Chinese food, and so on. People complained that the menus didn't give them a range of choices: they featured only one culture instead of being truly diverse. This was a particular problem for larger groups of diners. Different people wanted to eat different kinds of food, and no matter what restaurant the group ultimately decided on, someone would be excluded. More important, diners pointed out that most of the restaurants did not serve food that represented their (the diners') distinctive culture. This made it difficult for them to feel welcome, to feel at home. They wanted their own cultural foods featured throughout the district, not just confined to one or two places.

What began as letters to the editor in the local paper soon became a movement. Petition drives were launched and open forums were scheduled. Some more vocal leaders called for demonstrations and boycotts if the restaurants didn't embrace change. Fearing the bad publicity, civic leaders put pressure on the restaurant owners' association behind the scenes. Eventually, the city council passed a resolution calling for "inclusive eating environments" in the River District.

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Most of the restaurant owners saw the writing on the wall: the old ways of doing business would no longer work with consumers who demanded multicultural restaurants. They began to integrate their menus and serve different ethnic foods. It was awkward going at first. At several restaurants, waiters and waitresses often mispronounced or improperly described some of the newer items, leading to insulted patrons who said the restaurants still slighted "other" styles of food and were not truly inclusive—they still didn't "get it." In response, the owners' association hired a nationally known diversity expert to lead a series of sensitivity workshops for all employees in the district. They all learned through role-playing how to respect the culinary customs of different traditions and how it felt when one's own customs were treated with insensitivity.

Soon the restaurants had made real progress. Each featured dishes from around the world, and each was careful that the atmosphere inside the restaurant—the décor, music, uniforms, and so on—was multicultural as well. The owners even rotated employees, so the staff at each restaurant would be as multicultural as the menu. Eventually, the old signs that identified each restaurant with a particular region or culture came down, and new ones went up reflecting the new integrated approach.

These changes brought a sense of excitement to the River District. People came down to check out the atmosphere. They liked being able to get Italian or Chinese or Indian or Mexican food wherever they went. No matter where they happened to be eating, they knew what to expect; they were no longer intimidated by unfamiliar menus. Parents were especially pleased, because their kids could always find something they liked. Most of all, people liked the spirit of diversity and openness to all cultures in each of the restaurants. No matter where they went, they felt comfortable with the inclusive approach, and deep down they felt good about themselves for supporting such a progressive restaurant.

Even though the changes were popular, a few of the old-timers were alarmed. They pointed out that all the restaurants had become remarkably similar. Each featured the same basic décor, vaguely "global" but with nothing that was identifiably part of any actual culture. All the menus were extensive, but each offered the same predictable dishes from around the world; each culture had been reduced to two or three stereotypical items—tacos for Mexico, lasagna for Italy, egg rolls for China, and so on. And the real heart of the problem, the most significant change in the River District, according to the old-timers, was that the food simply wasn't as good. Each restaurant had cut itself off from the particular cultural tradition that once defined and sustained it, and the food had lost something. Even dishes with the same names prepared by cooks from the same recipes as before were not the same. The ingredients were identical, but something was missing. Those who noticed gave it different names—soul, spirit, kick, spark, life, confidence—but they all agreed that it was no longer there. It was not that the barbecued ribs or the curried chicken or the tamales at each restaurant were bad; they were just somehow lifeless and uninteresting.

But most people didn't notice, and complaints were few. When some claimed the River District had replaced the authentic diversity of particular cultures for a fake, homogenized diversity, people called them nostalgic and old-fashioned. They were dismissed as "ethnocentric" and "unicultural," opponents of progress and inclusive multiculturalism. Most people said that times had changed for the better, and the River District had changed with them. They were happy with the new style, and they respected the diversity represented by each restaurant, no matter which one it happened to be. ●

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DAVID CARROLL COCHRAN is the author of *The Color of Freedom: Race and Contemporary Liberalism.*


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# Class Doesn't Trump Culture

**Thomas Byrne Edsall**

*AMERICA'S FORGOTTEN MAJORITY: WHY THE WHITE WORKING CLASS STILL MATTERS*
*by Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers*
*Basic Books, 2000 232 pp $27*

THE BASIC PREMISE of Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers's *America's Forgotten Majority: Why the White Working Class Still Matters* is right on target. Over the past three decades, the most volatile and influential constituency in American elections has been the white, moderate-income voter, most often without a college degree. These are the voters who broke their ties to the Democratic Party to vote for candidates ranging from George Wallace to Richard Nixon to Ronald Reagan. They have been described as "the silent majority," "Reagan Democrats," and "angry white men." These voters were crucial to the creation of a conservative presidential majority throughout the 1980s. Bill Clinton's success in 1992 was based in large part on his ability to persuade them to cast a ballot for a Democrat who would "end welfare as we know it" and honor those who "work hard and play by the rules." In the 2000 election, strategists for both George W. Bush and Al Gore agreed that the key target constituency was "America's forgotten majority."

Teixeira and Rogers have put together a powerful array of data and statistics demonstrating the pivotal role of this critical group, and their argument in behalf of the white working class should be closely studied by all those who seek to influence national politics. But to understand the current competitive success of Republican candidates among lower income voters, the Teixeira-Rogers analysis should be expanded to include an analysis of the impact on the American electorate of the rights revolutions of the past thirty-five years—human rights, women's rights, civil rights, gay rights, defendants' rights, sexual rights, privacy rights, immigration rights, and, more generally, rights to a liberally conceived personal autonomy. The rights revolutions have changed the character of the two major political parties and have challenged the primacy of class-based analyses of American politics.

The strength of *America's Forgotten Majority* lies in the effective marshaling of data on both political and economic trends. Teixeira and Rogers show that virtually all of the decline in support for Democratic presidential candidates from the start of the 1960s through the 1980s and 1990s has been among white voters without college degrees, most especially white men. The finding most devastating for the Democrats is that the Republican revolution of 1994 was driven in large part by the defection to the GOP of male, white, high school graduates and those with some college education but without degrees. From 1992 to 1994, the Democratic margins among these two groups of men dropped an extraordinary twenty and fifteen points respectively. The Democratic margin among white women with high school degrees and those with some college both dropped by ten points. The smallest Democratic decline was among college-educated men, whose Democratic margins fell only six points. Among college-educated women, the Democratic margin actually increased by two points from 1992 to 1994.

Teixeira and Rogers correctly identify educational attainment as key to defining and targeting "the forgotten majority." But by focusing their attention on developing a coherent "class consciousness" based on shared economic interests, they underestimate the obstacles to constructing a bottom-up majority

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coalition. They are less attentive to mediating cultural and social conflicts than they are to cementing economic solidarity. Teixeira and Rogers focus on less well educated Americans as a single class, whose voting decisions are determined by gains or losses in median wages and family income. But this orientation, taken by itself, slights the importance of values issues in shaping contemporary politics. Social-cultural schisms between low- and moderate-income voters have consistently torpedoed the prospects for a durable center-left coalition and, since 1965, have proven lethal to the Democratic Party over and over again. Reducing the salience of divisive "identity" issues, as Teixeira and Rogers suggest, while stressing shared economic interests, would be an important first step, but inadequate to the enormity of the problem.

Not only are the backgrounds of America's white, non-college-educated workers exceptionally diverse in terms of ethnic, cultural, moral, and religious experience, the sources of employment for these voters are also very different. Non-college-educated workers are far less blue-collar than in the past; far more involved in technology, services, and in types of work falling outside the boundaries of traditional class analysis—sometimes on the bottom rungs of management; often hired and promoted because of their acquisition of new skills; and paid, in many cases, on the basis of individual performance rather than job classification.

The major revolutions of the last four decades—globalization, the technological-scientific-economic revolution, the sexual revolution, the civil rights revolution, the women's rights revolution, and immigration reform—have all had costs and benefits. Although the costs and benefits of these revolutions have been widespread, a significant share of the costs has been imposed on the large universe of non-college-educated white men. These men have taken much of the brunt of global competition and of deindustrialization; of the depletion of blue-collar work in auto plants, steel mills, and machine tool facilities; and of the transition to the high-tech production line. These men have been among the first to suffer from the abrupt shift from an economy powered by muscle and machinery to one dominated by computers and electronics. Just as in the industrial revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the least well educated have had the greatest difficulty in navigating the wrenching transition, and have often been the last to profit from the accelerating rates of productivity and from the generation of new wealth.

Men without college degrees have been left increasingly vulnerable not only to economic pressures, but also to status dislocation. White voters forming the core of the "forgotten majority" were among those who, as children, were ordered by the courts to participate in busing programs that ended neighborhood public schools—while the affluent remained secure in separate suburban townships or in private schools. Furthermore, these men and women are today often the parents of children whose public schools are failing dramatically. These are the workers who have been most likely to see jobs and promotions lost as employers comply with affirmative action programs—because some of the toughest programs were ordered for local government bureaucracies, police and fire departments, and the construction industry, once prime employers in America's working-class, white neighborhoods. These are the voters who were required to cede places and grant money in state colleges and universities to competitors benefiting from racial or gender preferences.

These are also the voters whose once orderly neighborhoods and classrooms became dangerously violent and whose traditional authority figures in the home and church lost influence. They have been angered by court decisions expanding defendants' rights. They have often been conflicted about changes in traditional morality—changes spurred by new contraceptive technologies in the 1960s—that have resulted not only in workplace participation by more than 60 percent of mothers of preschool children, but in an American out-of-wedlock birthrate of 30 percent, a divorce rate of 50 percent, and a steady increase in the number of single mothers. These are, furthermore, the voters who—having lived through


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their own interethnic conflicts, as the descendants of earlier Irish, Italian, Polish, Jewish, and Slavic migrants—have been among the most directly affected by newer waves of non-European newcomers.

By focusing on income to the exclusion of the ways in which the social-cultural and technological revolutions have altered the daily lives of lower income men and women, Teixeira and Rogers are unable to address the salience in modern elections of such issues as abortion, school prayer, gays in the military, civil unions, Internet pornography, welfare reform, faith-based social service initiatives, and gun control—issues that have had a powerful effect in securing Republican victories in the House, the Senate, and now the White House. Among the most arresting manifestations of the new social order is the gender gap in voting, with men (more tolerant of risk, deregulation, weapons, the general use of force, and exacerbated resource competition) inclined to vote Republican, and with women (more risk averse, more supportive of safe harbors, more receptive to government protection, and more opposed to guns and physical coercion) inclined to vote Democratic. Men and women are not acting as a class, they are acting as two separate interest groups, with differing ideas of what they want government to do and not to do.

Similarly, Teixeira and Rogers's determination to correlate voting trends with income patterns interferes with their account of recent economic developments. Although they write that the closing years of the 1990s "have been famously good ones, both for the U.S. economy as a whole and for the typical worker and family," they contend that for the forgotten majority, "their economic situation, while improved, has not been fundamentally altered." The benefits of rising productivity and growth, in fact, recently appeared to be moving down the educational ladder to benefit those who initially had the hardest time in accommodating change. If economic growth continues as it has, then an analysis of contemporary politics will need to encompass the dispersal to the white, non-college-educated electorate of new and genuinely valuable economic resources.

The 2000 election provided a partial test of one underlying message of Teixeira and Rogers's book, that the "forgotten majority" can be mobilized by a Democrat who makes explicit a left-populist commitment. This strategy was tested, albeit imperfectly, by Vice President Gore's campaign. Advised by pollster Stanley Greenberg, a leading advocate of just the kind of political strategies Teixeira and Rogers call for, Gore highlighted the theme of "the people against the powerful" and committed himself to represent "the people" in their struggles against drug companies, health maintenance organizations, and other major corporations and industries that exercise power over crucial choices made by Americans.

Exit polling on Election Day found that Gore's populism did less than hoped for to shape a new coalition. Instead, among all voters—including whites, blacks, and Hispanics—Gore and Bush evenly split both the college-educated and the non-college-educated groups. Similarly, except for the very poor—those with household incomes of less than $15,000—there was relatively little difference in the performance of the two candidates, with Gore doing better among the lower income and Bush among the upper income voters, but not by much:

| Annual income | Percentage of vote | |
|---|---|---|
| | Gore | Bush |
| 15-30K | 54 | 41 |
| 30-50K | 49 | 48 |
| 50-75K | 46 | 51 |
| 75-100K | 45 | 52 |
| OVER 100K | 43 | 54 |

These figures suggest an electorate shaped as much by non-economic, "post-materialist" forces as by the divisions Teixeira and Rogers highlight.

In the case of abortion, for example, those who believe that abortion should "always" be legal voted for Gore over Bush by a 70-25 margin, while those who think it should always be illegal voted for Bush by an even larger 74-22 margin, according to Voter News Service data. Voters in households with guns were for Bush by 60-36, and those from households without guns were for Gore, 64-40. Gays and lesbians

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voted for Gore over Bush by 70-25. Those who go to church more than once a week (14 percent of the electorate) were in Bush's corner, 63-36, while those who never attend church (also 14 percent of the electorate) backed Gore, 61-32. White voters who say they are part of the religious right gave Bush an 80-18 margin.

These figures suggest that the Democratic Party can no longer depend on overwhelming margins from working-class voters. Instead, the party's presidential candidates now find their strongest support among those in non-traditional relationships and families: urban and suburban singles, unmarried working mothers, gays and lesbians, the non-religious, and believers in abortion rights—from all socio-economic classes and from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds.

THE STRENGTH of cultural liberalism within the Democratic Party was demonstrated in the first days of the current Bush administration, when forty-two of fifty Democratic senators voted against one of their former colleagues, John Ashcroft, as attorney general. The abortion rights movement formed the core of the opposition to Ashcroft, as conflict over reproductive rights and obligations has become one of the central issues defining the two parties in the minds of voters.

Greg Adams, a political scientist at Carnegie Mellon University, has studied thirty years of poll data on abortion and argues that since 1980, "the parties have in fact fundamentally shifted to be aligned on social issues, most notably abortion. This 'realignment' has occurred within the parties both at the level of elected officials and among the general public." The Democratic Party has, in effect, taken the position of social, moral, and racial liberalism in the culture wars of the past thirty years, and, in doing so, has aligned itself with highly educated professionals, as much as with the traditional working class.

Bill Clinton was the first, and so far only, Democratic presidential candidate to win as an advocate of abortion rights and women's rights. Clinton's two plurality victories, however, and the statistical tie between Bush and Gore in 2000, demonstrate that the electorate appears to be not only deeply divided on the issues of the culture war, but evenly divided.

Changes in the composition of support for the Democratic and Republican Parties reflect the transformation of American society over the postwar years, and the alliance many non-college-educated white voters have made not with the Democratic Party, but with the GOP. Tom W. Smith, principal investigator at the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago writes, "Age and education have the largest and most consistent impact on family values and related attitudes. Those born and raised in more recent times have more modern views on family values like easier divorce and the role of women and mothers and on attitudes closely connected to the family like religion and sexual permissiveness. Similarly, the college educated (and especially those with advanced degrees) hold the most modern views while *those without a high school education are the most traditional. On family values and connected attitudes, more education promotes a modern point of view.*" (Italics added)

NORC found, for example, that the percentage of "traditional" households in which the husband works and the wife does not has fallen from 53 percent in 1972 to 24 percent in 1996, while the number in which both spouses work has grown from 32 to 59 percent. The percent of people disagreeing with the statement that "it is better if the man works and the woman stays at home" has grown from 34 percent in 1972 to 65.8 percent in 1998.

Attitudes toward homosexuality have also changed substantially in very recent years. From 1991 to 1998, the percentage of people saying homosexual relations are "never wrong" has grown from 14.9 to 28.2, while the percentage saying such relations are "always wrong" has dropped from 77.7 percent to 61 percent. The percentage of people saying "it is all right for a homosexual to teach college classes" has grown from 50 percent in 1972 to a decisive majority of 77.8 percent in 1998.

Few politicians understood these trends better than Bill Clinton. Over the course of his eight years in the White House, Clinton and his advisers saw the potential for shaping a Democratic Party coalition based on the social-moral left—jettisoning those non-college-educated


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white voters less oriented toward their economic class interest than toward their cultural and religious beliefs and more inclined to join a right-populist than a left-populist coalition.

In the 1996 presidential campaign, Dick Morris and Mark Penn, Clinton's two closest advisers, devised a mechanism for identifying voters likely to back Clinton and voters likely to back his Republican opponent, Bob Dole. Morris and Penn asked five questions, each one of which, according to the pollsters, directly or indirectly reflected a voter's key cultural and moral values and thus his or her likely voting behavior:

(1) Do you believe homosexuality is morally wrong?
(2) Do you personally look at pornography?
(3) Do you believe sex before marriage is morally wrong?
(4) Would you look down on someone who had an affair while they were married?
(5) Is religion very important in your life?

Voters who were pro-Clinton replied "no" to questions one, three, four and five and "yes" to question two, with the converse true for Dole voters. The way in which voters answered these questions was more predictive of their presidential vote, Morris and Penn found, than every other demographic measure except race and party identification.

Findings such as these help explain one of the puzzles facing Teixeira and Rogers: that although Democrats have suffered severe losses among working-class whites, they have made substantial inroads among the professional classes. Many highly educated, upper-income white voters strongly support women's rights, civil rights, sexual privacy, and abortion rights, all of which have become identified with the Democratic Party.

These Democratic gains have brought competitive financial resources—and a key base of institutional support—in the form of organized interest groups such as the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League, Planned Parenthood, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Human Rights Campaign Fund. Gains among economic and cultural elites, however, have come at a cost, and that cost has been substantial losses among voters holding "traditional" moral outlooks, many of them in the lower half of the income distribution—particularly, but not exclusively, religious evangelical conservatives; rural voters; white, Catholic, working-class voters; hunters (often white, working-class males); those who believe that life begins at conception; and those who believe that the primary role of women is to raise children and maintain a home.

Teixeira and Rogers have made a significant contribution to the political debate in identifying both the broad scope of Democratic losses among once-loyal voters and the suffering such voters have experienced as their livelihoods have been threatened and their families stressed by downward pressures on the working-class male wage. To restore the vitality of a left coalition will clearly require effective political appeals targeted to America's white, non-college-educated majority. But crafting such appeals will not be easy. ●

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# Missing the Point

**Corey Robin**

BOWLING ALONE: THE COLLAPSE AND REVIVAL OF AMERICAN COMMUNITY
*by Robert Putnam*
*Simon & Schuster, 2000 544 pp $26*

TUCKED AWAY on a shelf in my parents' home is a trophy honoring their achievements in the Knights of Pythias bowling league. My parents haven't bowled in years, but after they got married in 1957, bowling was the ticket to membership in their adopted community, an unassuming suburb near Atlantic City. Now they live in Chappaqua, New York. The trophy stands forgotten in a corner of their big house, a furtive reminder of their modest beginnings. Long before they were neighbors of Hillary and Bill, it seems, my mom and dad bowled with Ralph and Alice Cramden.

Today, my parents lament the loss of community symbolized by that lonely trophy. Perched at the top of what might well be a mile-long driveway, they complain that the world is more isolated than it used to be. Losing sight of how they uprooted themselves, they forget that their escape from community was also an attempt to escape from class, or, to be more precise, from the lower to the upper class. Coming up that driveway, they thought less about saying good-bye to neighborhood than saying hello to status. And so their mourning, for all its poignancy, is saddled with evasive sentimentality.

In *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam, for a time one of our foremost political sociologists and philosopher-king of the Clinton White House, seeks to rescue anxiety about the loss of community from just this kind of sentimentality. Where communitarians have tended toward the woozy and the gooey—even Amitai Etzioni or Jean Bethke Elshtain would tire quickly of an afternoon spent hanging out at the local drugstore, sipping ice cream sodas, figuring out who exactly's gonna be Bobby's girl—Putnam strains for the hardheaded. The consequence of declining civitas, he says, is not the intangible loneliness of anomie. It's inefficiency. Community is a form of "social capital." Like physical capital in economic theory, social capital is an asset. Linking people in tight networks, it encourages trust and reciprocity, making "everyday business and social transactions . . . less costly." Crime goes down, workplace morale goes up, Rolodexes get fat. Putnam's tract is thus perfectly calibrated to the dot-com moment, when every virtue—even the fuzziest—must justify itself in the language of economics.

But for all its shrewdness, Putnam's stance is no less evasive than my parents'. Lurking beneath his social science are two questionable assumptions. First, although he distinguishes between "bonding" and "bridging" social capital, Putnam believes that different forms of community or "civic participation" are essentially the same. Whether people eat out or act up, shout at the ball game or in the streets, they are doing things together, and that's what counts. Because there is virtually no distinction between politics, entertainment, and hanging out, the same causes must explain how often people vote, go to a meeting of the Kiwanis Club, or visit their next-door neighbors. Second, those causes are cultural and individual rather than institutional and political. If people don't march, it's because of the zeitgeist. If they don't get involved, it's because of their souls. To unravel the causes of declining participation, says Putnam, we need not consider the power of state elites, economic classes, or political conflict. We need only invoke those classic dei ex machina of American cultural criticism: technology and nostalgia.


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American intellectuals have worried for years about declining community. But community is an elusive concept, so it has been nearly impossible to establish its demise—until now. Amassing a set of numbers that would make even the most earnest social scientist blanch, Putnam has the hard data to prove that across almost every conceivable measure of communal participation—voting, attending club meetings, playing cards, and, yes, bowling in leagues—Americans today are doing things together less. Putnam also demonstrates the deleterious effects of declining community. With three appendices, nine tables, fifty-nine pages of footnotes, and ninety-five charts, he shows the relationship between social connectedness and racial toleration, tax evasion, mortality rates, violent crime, educational performance—even "national average happiness."

Propelling our flight from community—at least, says Putnam, a good 75 percent of it—is a lethal combination of television and the passing of what he calls the "long civic generation," those men and women who came of age around the Second World War. Under the shadow of war, this generation became patriotic and volunteered in droves. But subsequent generations grew up on television instead of ration cards. The remote control, warns Putnam, is today's most insidious teacher: "I suspect," he says, "that the link between channel surfing and social surfing is more than metaphorical." As the older generation dies off, self-interested baby boomers and materialistic Generation X-ers increasingly monopolize the public sphere. Although Putnam sees some hopeful signs (volunteer rates among youth are up), things generally don't look good for democracy in America.

EVEN THOUGH Putnam is a political scientist by training—he's slated to be the next president of the American Political Science Association—and is alarmed by a genuine political problem, his analysis is decidedly apolitical. To Putnam, the loss of the "long civic generation" is a demographic, not a political, fact. Television is a piece of technology that he believes has become a way of life. Cultural factors—the priorities and commitments of society—are, for him, the most important causes of civic decline. Where centuries of political thinkers, from Aristotle to Arendt, believed that social mores were structured by politics—the distribution of power, the drama of political contest, the quality of public leadership—Putnam reverses that causality, deeming our weak-tea politics a manifestation of bad habits in society. Culture, in other words, determines politics, and not vice versa.

The order of the day, then, is not, for the most part, political transformation but cultural regeneration. As part of his "agenda for social capitalists," Putnam proposes increased leisure time so that we can "replenish our stocks of social capital," more sidewalks to facilitate greater socializing, and such cultural activities as "group dancing" and "songfests"—even "rap festivals." Despite the range of these proposals, they are of the cultural uplift variety and radiate the spirit of Nancy Reagan. To reverse the tide of civic decline, we should just say no . . . to what? *Seinfeld*? And what does Putnam offer in its place? Everything, he says, "from team sports to choirs and from organized altruism to grassroots social movements." Social movements sound fine, but it's difficult to imagine a society organized around football, blood drives, and *Cats*. Actually, it's not difficult at all; it's the society we have today, the very society where no one participates.

With its focus on cultural pathology as the source of civic withdrawal, Putnam's work echoes that of previous generations of American social critics. Whenever political life in this country seems constricted, intellectuals start talking about habits of the heart. Rather than confront the political sources of apathy and communal decline—particularly the role of repression—American intellectuals prefer to speculate about the American soul, rampant individualism, consumerism, or other deformities of popular culture. Instead of examining how elites have used political repression to prevent people from participating, and how that repression leads people to retreat to their homes, intellectuals invoke an imaginary culture of withdrawal and isolation. Putnam's argument, then, is not eccentric; it comes out of a long-standing tradition of American thought.

In the 1950s, for example, figures such as

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David Riesman, Daniel Bell, Lionel Trilling, Louis Hartz, and C. Wright Mills stared across the political desert of cold war America and concluded that its arid terrain was the product of anomie and cultural conformity. What their accounts had in common was a refusal to confront political repression and fear. Immediately following the unprecedented strike wave of 1946, a coalition of business elites, conservative Republicans, and timid Democrats spearheaded a crackdown on the left, culminating not only in the Taft-Hartley Act but in McCarthyism. Through loyalty oaths and employment tests, union purges and blacklists, public- and private-sector investigations, Americans got the message that they should stay away from any activity that smacked of communism—which often meant any political activity at all.

Lost in the lonely crowd, contemporary intellectuals overlooked the impact of these events. They simply could not imagine that political repression had produced the silence they bemoaned. They were not unwilling to address America's dark side; Mills was certainly no cold war apologist, and anyone could see the deep scratches of acrid criticism in the work of Riesman, Hartz, and Trilling. But even among leftists, the category of political repression had dropped out of their vocabulary, at least when it came to the United States. After all, their major complaint was that the United States was "too" liberal, that it lacked a reactionary or even respectable conservative tradition. How could a country asphyxiated by liberalism be guilty of overt political illiberalism? Conformity and alienation provided more serviceable metaphors for intellectuals unable to see political repression even when it stared them in the face.

PUTNAM, like many communitarians, suffers from a similar blindness. Although he agonizes over the isolation and emptiness of American public life, he cannot see how elites have consciously restricted participation over the last thirty years. Charges of political repression in contemporary America may sound melodramatic and anachronistic. But if we think about the recent history of the labor movement, they appear less extreme. For in a sense, union busting is to our time what McCarthyism was to the fifties. Since the early 1970s, union busting has been perfected as a genuine political art, with sophisticated consultants and Ivy League lawyers honing their skills in workplace after workplace. Last August, Human Rights Watch issued a report charging that every year more than twenty thousand workers in the United States are the victims of anti-union repression. The report concluded that "many workers who try to form trade unions are spied on, harassed, pressured, threatened, suspended, fired, deported or otherwise victimized in reprisal" and denounced the "culture of near-impunity [that] has taken shape in much of U.S. labor law and practice."

The impact of union busting is not limited to the workplace. Like McCarthyism, the effects of anti-union repression dilate into the far reaches of civil society, which explains at least some of the apathy and civic despair that Putnam criticizes. Historically, union members have marched and struggled for social justice outside the workplace, creating monuments of solidarity such as Social Security and civil rights—even, as Josh Freeman has recently shown, the lineaments of European social democracy in cities like New York. During elections, they raise armies of precinct walkers and organizers who turn quiet streets into political battlegrounds. Unions in and out of the workplace thus create the civic infrastructure that Putnam prizes; when they are destroyed, it is too.

The repression of unions—like other kinds of political repression—also produces the culture of isolation that *Bowling Alone* decries. Men and women who have been punished for union activism go home, get depressed, and withdraw from all but the most intimate family circles. If they talk about their experience, they teach their children and spouses lessons about the futility of democracy more powerful than anything learned in an afternoon watching the soaps. The more resourceful sometimes manage to involve themselves in the community, opting for socially acceptable activities such as volunteering on the weekend. The very busyness of community participation, which Putnam praises as one of the vital signs of democracy, turns out to be Prozac for the politi-


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cally depressed. Faced with these choices—total withdrawal or the Parent Teacher Association—who wouldn't turn on the tube?

Putnam does discuss the decline of unions, but his analysis reflects the shortcomings of his overall thesis. Unions for him are like Rotary Clubs and the American Medical Association. Men and women don't join them for the same reason they don't get involved in the PTA: They simply lack the cultural capacity to make connections with other people. Their decline is a symptom, not a cause, of democratic erosion. In one paragraph, Putnam recites, almost as if it bores him, the usual causes offered by serious scholars of union decline: "adverse changes in public policy, such as the antistrike policy introduced by the Reagan administration during the air traffic controllers strike of 1982, virulent employer resistance, flaccid union strategy, and so on." The "and so on" conveys his breezy dismissal of the idea that men and women don't join unions because they are just too frightened. Citing an economist, Putnam claims instead that unions are on the wane because "the young worker"—presumably hooked on *Friends* —"thinks primarily of himself."

For Putnam, the rise and fall of community is best captured by economic metaphors: Environmental organizations are the "growth stocks" of the "associational world"; a dip in church membership in the 1960s was a "market correction" after an unhealthy boom in the 1950s; a neighborhood barbecue or an evening of poker with friends is "a tiny investment in social capital." He invokes this economic vocabulary to show that, despite our differences, we ultimately have the same interest—increasing our social capital—and so he can heartily summon us to work together for a common good. In the real world, of course, none of us has an abstract interest in community: Feminists organize for the National Organization for Women and against the Promise Keepers; corporate executives raise money for the United Way and smash unions; homophobes love the church and hate ACT-UP. So such calls, no matter how heartfelt, sound mawkish. Having ditched communitarian sentimentality for the stern logic of social capital, Putnam ultimately settles for a weird form of economic romanticism. Call it the treacly science.

Like so many contemporary intellectuals, Putnam wants to have it both ways. He longs for a vibrant public square where men and women meet to discuss the great questions of the day and then continue the conversation over beers. But he won't touch the political conflicts—particularly about capitalism and economic inequality—that drive people in and out of that square. And for that reason, his is a failed jeremiad. For all its folksy optimism, *Bowling Alone* reminds us that communitarianism, even the most resolutely hardheaded, demands a Lear-like dispensation. Whether mourning our loss or compiling its vital statistics, the communitarian stands atop a lonely heath—or long driveway—unable to comprehend the reasons of his own exile. ●

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# Outside the Whale

**Russell Jacoby**

C. Wright Mills, Letters and Autobiographical Writings
*ed. Kathryn Mills with Pamela Mills*
*introduction by Dan Wakefield*
*University of California Press, 2000*
*378 pp $34.95*

In the nineteen fifties and early sixties, C. Wright Mills cut a wide swath through the intellectual and political terrain. A one-man show from the hinterlands—a rebel in an American vein—he raged against apathy and conformity. With *White Collar* and *The Power Elite*, he published two of the few sociological best-sellers in the post–world war years. He also co-edited a splendid Max Weber anthology, *From Max Weber*; wrote a tough-minded critique of the sociological profession, *The Sociological Imagination;* and, before he was struck down by a heart attack at age forty-six, brought out a series of hard-hitting booklets on American foreign policy such as *Listen Yankee* and *The Causes of World War Three*. His collected essays, *Power, Politics and People,* assembled after his death (and lamentably out of print) bristle with intelligence.

In 1960, he drafted a "Letter to the New Left," originally published in the *New Left Review*. Its opening might have been written yesterday. "It is no exaggeration to say that since the end of World War II in Britain and the United States smug conservatives, tired liberals and disillusioned radicals have carried on a weary discourse in which issues are blurred and potential debate muted; the sickness of complacency has prevailed, the bi-partisan banality flourished." The essay closed presciently, "We are beginning to move again."

Not, however, soon or fast enough for Mills. He was a man in a rush. As he became more politically engaged he also felt more beleaguered, as if he alone carried the weight of the world. Despite his wide contacts and international invitations, he felt "very much isolated and alone"—and perhaps he was. His defense of the Cuban Revolution, his criticism of cold war policies, and his impatience with American intellectuals earned him few friends. After his first heart attack, and a year before his fatal one in 1962, he confided to his mother that he did not fear death in "the slightest"; he sensed "a big responsibility" to "tell the truth as I see it and to tell it exactly . . . and quit this horsing around with sociological bullshit." "There is no hurry," he wrote to Ralph Milliband, the English socialist, a year earlier "except I am in a hurry! . . . I've got four, yes four books bubbling inside me." He complained to E. P. Thompson, the English historian, of the mounting "pressure" to defend Cuba. "I have to do it . . . because nobody else will stand up."

Mills complained of exhaustion and the need to rest, but hardly slackened his pace. Perhaps he paid a price for coming to political maturity in the unpromising fifties. His sometime political compatriots like Dwight Macdonald and Irving Howe emerged in the thirties and could weather a cold decade; Mills could not. He had no experience with a radical period and its waning. He could be situated among 1950s radicals who died of heart attacks in their prime—people like Robert Lindner, the psychologist who wrote *Rebel Without a Cause*, and Paul Baran, who co-authored *Monopoly Capital*. In an era of political timidity, their radicalism kept them up nights; the stress of solitary opposition lodged itself in their arteries and veins. They would have been celebrated in the later sixties, but did not make it that far.

Mills was born and raised in Texas, and


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went to graduate school at the University of Wisconsin, where he encountered Hans Gerth, a refugee scholar from Germany who had been a student of Karl Mannheim. The bright and ambitious Mills absorbed European social theory; he also surpassed the career of his troubled mentor, who never found his feet in America and published little. To this day, sociologists who resent Mills's success and politics claim that he misused Gerth. You are "one of the very few men whose judgment I respect," Mills wrote. To the end of his own life he urged Gerth to publish and resist the bureaucratic university. "Gerth, you don't fight it enough." At a memorial Gerth spoke warmly of Mills. "I have lost my friend, as the Romans used to say, my 'alter ego.'"

Mills went on to teach at Columbia and cavort with New York intellectuals, but he never surrendered his identity as an outsider. He always saw himself as the kid from Texas living in the big city. He may have been just that; the strength and appeal of his oeuvre derive in part from the can-do, hands-on Yankee ethos that few of his intellectual colleagues shared. As a model for intellectual work, he took the craftsman, a skilled laborer who could design and complete a project. His appendix to *The Sociological Imagination*, a book addressed to sociology students, is titled "On Intellectual Craftsmanship." Mills writes of his "own craft" and how beginning sociologists should exchange baroque theories for a hands-on approach. The craftsman produces not only a valuable object, but him- or herself. "The intellectual workman forms his own self as he works toward the perfection of his craft."

Mills loved building things and tinkering with his motorcycles; he spent several summers constructing vacation homes from scratch, doing with his wife virtually all the woodwork and plumbing. He sought support for academic research in Europe, but when he finally visited the continent, he accompanied BMW motorcycle mechanics traveling to the Munich factory to hone their skills. "It is very proper," Mills commented, "that no intellectual group or agency should send me to Europe but that I should smell it for the first time as an amateur mechanic." He sprinkled letters to fellow academics with farming and construction information as well as news about drills and saws he purchased. He reported to Gerth that he worked hard "all day burning my five acres in preparation for spring plowing and also put down 400 sq. feet of 5/8-inch plywood on the living room floor in preparation for the rubber tile." Or he recounted his week's activity: "lifting telephone sized poles for the foundation and chopping them while still wet and soaked from water; setting up the 2 by 8 sill structure and laying in the subflooring."

The myth of the cowboy-novelist or the trucker-poet flourishes in America; and a skeptic might put down Mills as a variant, a phony mechanic-carpenter-sociologist. Mills himself once satirized this pose, plumping his own credentials. "I have driven trucks in the East Texas oil fields; I've helped dig a ditch between Long View and Talco; and I've driven a tractor hauling a combine in the wheat fields up in the Texas Panhandle." He added that he did these things only in the summer, knowing full well that "come the fall, I'd be safe back at school."

Yet Mills did possess a toughness and self-reliance that his colleagues lacked, and perhaps this derived from his half real and half mythic Texas identity. *White Collar*, which laid out the transformation of the independent to dependent middle class, was at least partly autobiographical. His grandfather had been a rancher, "shot in the back with a .30-30 rifle"; his father an insurance company agent. Mills always remained something of the ornery straight-shooting frontiersman. In one of his final letters, he wrote about the guns he had acquired. What other twentieth-century intellectuals have combined a commitment to writing with frontier crafts? Is this something peculiarly American, the intellectual-as-carpenter? Thoreau celebrating his ability to construct everything he needed for his daily existence?

Mills called himself a Wobbly or follower of the IWW, the Industrial Workers of the World. The Wobblies were anarcho-syndicalists with a visceral distaste for authority. In an introduction to Thorsten Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Mills wrote that this iconoclastic critic was "a masterless, recalcitrant man and if we must group him somewhere in

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the American scene, it is with those most recalcitrant Americans, the Wobblies." In a letter, Mills explained what being a Wobbly entailed. "I refer less to political orientation than to political ethos, and I take Wobbly to mean one thing: the opposite of bureaucrat."

> I am outside the whale, and got that way through social isolation and self-help. But do you know what a Wobbly is? It's a kind of spiritual condition. . . . A Wobbly is not only a man who takes orders from himself. He's also a man who's often in the situation where there are no regulations to fall back upon. . . . He doesn't like bosses–capitalist or communistic–they are all the same to him. . . . He wants to be, and wants everyone else to be, his own boss. . . . This kind of spiritual condition, and only this, is Wobbly freedom.

Mills aptly stressed the spiritual core of his anarchism. Unlike card-carrying members of the IWW, he had limited faith in direct working-class action. If anything, he considered intellectuals a possible source of political change. To be sure, Mills also denounced intellectuals as sellouts; one chapter of *White Collar* is titled "Brains, Inc." Nevertheless, Mills denounced intellectuals because he believed in them; they could spearhead political resistance. On exactly this score, Mills earned the wrath of other anarchists. In 1970, Fredy Perlman of the Detroit Black & Red publishing house savaged Mills in *The Incoherence of the Intellectual*. Perlman decried that the astute Mills would write off the workers, that Mills could blast intellectuals as toadies of power and turn around to treat them as the political answer. Mills labeled the intellectuals "the Swiss Guard of the Power Elite." Yet he calls on "these fragmentary men" to become "Promethean history-makers." Perlman mocked Mills for signing up "the Carpetbaggers to overthrow the slave system."

He may have been right, though today these charges exude the stale air of basement leftism, which was foreign to Mills. What comes across in Mills's letters, lovingly edited and annotated by his daughters, is his effort to open windows. He was never happy with standard leftism, disciplinary boundaries, or scholarly jargon. Even early in his career he applied for a Guggenheim grant, boldly explaining, "I have never had occasion to take very seriously much of American sociology." Increasingly, he saw himself as writer, not a sociologist or professor. After Macdonald reviewed *White Collar*, ridiculing its prose, Mills bandaged the hurt and asked him for concrete suggestions. Mills wanted to write well and evocatively–and sometimes he did. Years after a summer affair in New York, he wrote the lady that coming back uptown he had the cab "swing over" and stop at the curb of their Fourteenth Street apartment.

> I looked the place over and I remembered what it had meant to me. . . I remember wild rice and French fried onions and all the strawberries you could eat; lacquer on the hair and thousands of bobby pins and the smell of well-kept offices at noon. . . I remember the ferryboats and the pictures shows. . . I said to the cabbie, "That's where I grew up. It was sorta hard." And he said, "Yeah, it's always hard." And there was worry about it. After all 14th Street in the middle forties produced *White Collar* along with so many other things. . . . And now when all that is either dead or impossible, which amounts to the same thing, I wonder what I'll write and how I'll write it.

Several times Mills contemplated giving up his Columbia appointment to make a life as a writer, a step he hesitated to take. Among various projects, he wanted to write "a very strange kind of book" about "that part of my life" omitted from his other publications, a book of European travel impressions.

He never had the chance. He left behind a significant body of work, but it is tempting to speculate what Mills would have written if he had lived longer. What kind of sociologist would he have become? Undoubtedly, a few sociologists continue to idolize Mills, but it is difficult to identify one who has filled his shoes. Irving Louis Horowitz, who edited Mills's essays and wrote a biography, long ago surrendered any association with him. Alvin Gouldner, author of *The Crisis in Western Sociology*, may have had a claim, but he also died relatively young. In an appreciative afterword to a new edition of *The Sociological Imagination*, Todd Gitlin mentions the old critics of Mills, such as Daniel Bell and David Riesman, but names no successors or even followers; and it might be revealing that Gitlin himself moved


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from a sociology department to one called culture and communication.

Of course, Mills might not have been able to fill his own shoes, as it were; he wrote and lived at a fevered pitch, penning a dozen books and marrying four times. Would he have aged gracefully to become a chaired professor of sociology? Doubtful. Would he have become a conference-going theorist of gender, class, and race? Unlikely. It is perhaps most inviting to imagine Mills taking the plunge he pondered, leaving the university to earn his keep as a peripatetic writer and critic. He closed a letter exulting that, as he motorcycled across Europe, he encountered a "thousand faces I'll never forget. And way up in the Norwegian hills a village with only two big stores: a flower shop and a bookstore." This Mills, who wrote from the heart and the head, we have missed. ●

RUSSELL JACOBY is author of *The End of Utopia, The Last Intellectuals*, and other books. He teaches history at the University of California at Los Angeles.

# If You're So Egalitarian, How Come You're a Philosopher?

**George Scialabba**

IF YOU'RE AN EGALITARIAN, HOW COME YOU'RE SO RICH?
*by G. A. Cohen*
*Harvard University Press, 2000 233 pp $35*

PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIAL HOPE
*by Richard Rorty*
*Penguin Books, 2000 288 pp $13.95*

W. H. AUDEN said that "poetry makes nothing happen," and Karl Marx said the same thing (though not in so many words) about philosophy. The latter opinion would seem to place a Marxist philosopher in a curious position, especially one who is a leading exponent of historical materialism, which aims, with unrivaled ambitiousness and decisiveness, to explain what, if not philosophy, does make things happen. According to historical materialism, what makes things happen is the development of the productive forces. Hence, wrote the brash young Marx of *The German Ideology*, "the study of the real world is to the study of philosophy as romantic love is to self-abuse."

Whether or not "Marxist philosopher" turns out, on investigation, to be an oxymoron, G. A. Cohen, successor to Isaiah Berlin and Charles Taylor as Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at Oxford University, is undoubtedly the most illustrious member of that species at present. Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense* (1978) applied the methods of analytic and "ordinary language" philosophy to the interpretation of historical materialism. It has been widely praised and widely debated. *History, Labour, and Freedom* (1988) collects Cohen's further reflections and responses to criticism. In *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality* (1995), Cohen engages with the leading liberal and libertarian political philosophers in the English-speaking world: Ronald Dworkin, Robert Nozick, and John Rawls. (His demolition of Nozick will be highly gratifying to anyone who, like this reviewer, has long found the prestige of Nozick's arguments both inexplicable and exasperating.)

*If You're an Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* is neither a treatise nor a collection of articles; it is the 1996 Gifford Lectures—the granddaddy of distinguished lecture series. Cohen ranges very widely. One lecture compares religious and political conviction. Another charmingly recounts his "Montreal Communist Jewish childhood." Another contrasts "utopian" and "scientific" socialism, correcting the vul-

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gar disparagement of the former and showing how the latter is compromised by the "obstetrical" motif of classical Marxism. (For example, "New higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself.") Still another lecture, "A Lighter Look at the Problem of Evil," was a songfest. "The audience accepted my invitation to sing with me, to the accompaniment of tapes, a set of American popular songs that illustrate how bad things can be good." Alas, this lecture is not reproduced. (I don't see why Harvard University Press couldn't—especially considering the book's price—have included a CD of this lecture, as it did of Helen Vendler reciting Shakespeare's sonnets to accompany her book on that subject.) These introductory or digressive chapters are witty, vivid, and—particularly Cohen's discussion of Hegel, who actually begins to make sense under the ministrations of analytic philosophy—illuminating.

The theme of *If You're an Egalitarian . . .* is the failure of historical materialism and the resulting "turn to normative political philosophy" by Cohen and other Marxists. With admirable lucidity and lack of fuss, Cohen acknowledges that "inevitabilitarian" Marxism—on which he had built his reputation and founded his hopes—was mistaken. That doctrine was based on two predictions: the growth in size, organization, and insecurity of the working class and the prospect of a limitlessly increasing material abundance. Both these predictions have been falsified. The working class is too diverse, geographically and occupationally, to be anywhere near as well organized as international capital for the foreseeable future. And the social welfare policies of the industrialized countries have so far prevented an increase in misery beyond the crisis point. The other half of the inevitabilitarian pincer movement—the supposedly irresistible force of limitless growth—has run into an immovable object: the limits to growth. Cohen asserts flatly that the attainment of a present-day European or North American standard of living by everyone on the planet is an absurd and dangerous fantasy. He is quite right to disdain arguing this point in detail; it is indeed so obvious that only a diehard opponent of income redistribution and ecological sanity (such as a *Wall Street Journal* editorial writer) could disagree.

If inevitability is off, then philosophers must argue for equality on moral grounds. The most successful and influential of such arguments is that of John Rawls. In brief, Rawls says that if we're setting up a society and want to be fair, we'll look for arrangements that don't give anyone or any group an advantage. Any possible basis for such an advantage—brains, brawn, looks, charm, character, fire in the belly—is merely the luck of the draw, genetically or environmentally. But since we care about liberty as well as fairness, we can't prohibit inequality outright—that would be too intrusive. So Rawls proposed the "difference principle": the only justified inequalities are those that improve the condition of the worst off. If unequal rewards are required to motivate the most talented people to produce more, and some of that additional production can be redistributed, then the extra rewards are justified. In practice, this means progressive—but not too progressive—taxation and generous—but not too generous—social provision.

If you've taken any notice of political philosophy in the last three decades, the foregoing paragraph is old hat. Rawls's theory has given rise to a vast body of interpretation and commentary, but Cohen has apparently managed to come up with an original criticism of it. To avoid infringing liberty, the "difference principle" applies only to the basic structure of society, defining a set of rules. Within that structure and those rules, people are free to make whatever choices they please, yet because of the difference principle the outcomes will be just: the worst off will be as well off as possible.

But, Cohen objects, there is a logical difficulty here. Either most people in a society accept the difference principle or they don't. If they do, then they can't reasonably demand extra rewards for being more productive, since the only justification for extra rewards, according to the difference principle, is that some people (that is, some *other* people: to wit, those who don't accept the difference principle) will refuse to be more productive without them. On the other hand, if a majority don't accept the difference principle, then they can and will set


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their demands for extra compensation high enough to deny a decent minimum to the worst off. (A related question, which Cohen does not address, is why any society in which a majority did not accept the difference principle would adopt a basic structure modeled on that principle.) As Cohen concludes: "A society that is just within the terms of the difference principle . . . requires not simply just coercive *rules*, but also an *ethos* of justice that informs individual choices." In other words, a society will be no more decent than those who make it up. You may be surprised, as I was, that no other political philosopher has thought of this since the publication of Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* in 1971. But better late than never.

Having shown that neither from history nor from philosophy but verily out of the heart of man cometh justice, Cohen proceeds, in the book's final chapter, to probe the hearts of rich egalitarians. If you have more money than most people, he asks, and you believe in equality, how can you justify not giving most of your money away? I admit that this question got my back up at first. I am Sicilian, and as D. H. Lawrence remarked about one of his characters, "He was a Sicilian who feels he is being done out of his money—and that is saying everything." But Cohen seems to mean *rich* egalitarians, not freelance writers with a tiny condo and a modest retirement account. After much painstaking and ingenious argumentation, Cohen persuaded me that rich people should indeed give a lot of money away, though he also notes with commendable circumspection that "there is a great deal more to be said about the problem."

I'M NOT SURE Richard Rorty would agree. At least, I'm not sure he'd agree that there's a great deal more to be said by philosophers. As he observes in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, some people "still think that . . . being right about philosophical matters is important for right action. I think this is important only occasionally and incidentally." Normative philosophers like Rawls and Dworkin think that "liberal societies are bound together by philosophical beliefs." Pragmatists like Rorty think that what binds societies together are sentiments, memories, images—"common vocabularies and common hopes." It is not any philosophical doctrine about human nature or obligation that produces solidarity, but the ability to grasp imaginatively other people's capacity for suffering or joy. As Rorty put it in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989): "Detailed descriptions of particular varieties of pain and humiliation (in, e.g., novels or ethnographies), rather than philosophical or religious treatises, have been the modern intellectual's principal contributions to moral progress."

This certainly answers to my own sense of the futility of political philosophy, even in the hands of a brilliant and high-minded practitioner like Cohen. Consider the following statement by Cohen:

> I do not say that *because* everyday choice cannot be, as the basic-structure objection says it is, beyond the reach of justice, simply because it *is* everyday choice, it then follows that everyday economic choice is indeed within its reach; that would be a non sequitur. I say, rather, that it is not an objection to my argument for the claim that justice evaluates everyday economic choice that everyday choice is (in general) beyond the reach of justice, since it is not.

When I read such a statement, I cannot help wondering how many rich egalitarians will take his point to heart. As many, I would guess, as have been spurred to heroic sacrifices by reading Rawls or Dworkin.

In *Philosophy and Social Hope* there is a *jeu d'esprit*, "Looking Backwards from the Year 2096," which gently twits Rorty's egalitarian philosophical colleagues.

> Here, in the late twenty-first century, as talk of fraternity and unselfishness has replaced talk of rights, American political discourse has come to be dominated by quotations from Scripture and literature, rather than from political theorists or social scientists. Fraternity, like friendship, was not a concept that either philosophers or lawyers knew how to handle. They could formulate principles of justice, equality and liberty, and invoke these principles when weighing hard moral or legal issues. But how to formulate a "principle of fraternity"? Fraternity is an inclination of the heart, one that produces a sense of shame at having much when others have little. It is not the sort of



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thing that anybody can have a theory about or that people can be argued into having.

The sort of thing that might elicit an impulse of fraternity is a small jewel of an essay in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, entitled "Love and Money." In half a dozen elegiac pages Rorty muses on the bleak prospects of the unfortunate global majority. Even assuming a significant increase in rich egalitarians, "nobody who reads the statistics about the unthinkably poor of the South can generate any optimism." It is a quiet but intense lament, not thunderous or coruscating; just the melancholy reflections of a wise, decent, literate man. But even its pessimism is an act of fraternity. ●

GEORGE SCIALABBA, a book critic, lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

# Wresting Freedom from Necessity

**Benjamin Kunkel**

THE FIERCE AND BEAUTIFUL WORLD
*by Andrei Platonov*
*translated by Joseph Barnes, introduction by Tatyana Tolstaya*
*New York Review Books, 2000*
*288 pp $12.95 paper*

IN ANDREI PLATONOV'S novel *The Foundation Pit*, Nastya—a beautiful and precociously ideological, kulak-baiting little girl on whose especial behalf socialism is being constructed in Russia—boasts of having delayed her birth until the revolution: "As soon as Lenin came, I came too."

Nastya's creator—whom Joseph Brodsky and others have considered the greatest twentieth-century writer of Russian prose—knew the perils of an opportune birth. Born in 1899 in a small settlement on the open steppe near Voronezh, Platonov lived in lockstep with his times, turning eighteen just as revolution arrived and identifying his hopes with those of the new Soviet state. Few if any other modern novelists were able to so thoroughly assimilate history to art. Platonov made "lyrico-satirical" fables—to use Gorky's disapproving term—of Lenin's electrification campaign, the first Five Year Plan, the sovietization of Turkmenistan, and the demobilization of soldiers from the Second World War—even as these upheavals were taking place.

As a teenager, Platonov attempted to construct a *perpetuum mobile*; later on in his great utopian fantasy, *Chevengur*, he imagined a new earth producing crops by itself, without any touch of a peasant's hand. But self-sufficiency was not his psychological model. All of his fictional people ask in some form the question of his title character in "Makar the Doubtful": "What am I to do in life in order to be needed by myself and others?" In 1921, Platonov answered by giving up literature in favor of *zhiznestroenie* or "life-building." He worked for several years as a land-reclamation engineer—the effort to wrest life from dead nature is one of his fiction's preoccupying themes—and in 1926 he received a government certificate crediting him with having dug in the course of three years an astonishingly Stakhanovite 763 ponds and 331 wells. It is impossible not to think of this enormous labor of digging while reading *The Foundation Pit*, the story of a peasant village's efforts to construct a huge apartment building in which to house the local "proletariat." In the end, the workers dig—instead of a foundation pit—their own mass grave.

It is no surprise that *The Foundation Pit*, completed in 1931, could not be published in the Soviet Union before *glasnost*. But it seems


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genuinely to have surprised and pained Platonov that his work could be accused of being "counterrevolutionary." Platonov first fell afoul of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) in 1929. He had been publishing for only two years, and if there was no disguising the satirical element in his stories of collectivization, he seems nevertheless to have imagined that the authorities would perceive his loyalty to the revolution. In a canceled ending to *The Foundation Pit,* he wrote

> Will the USSR die like Nastya, or will it grow into a whole person, a new historical society? . . . . The author may have been mistaken in representing the death of Soviet society through the death of the little girl, but this mistake was occasioned only by excessive anxiety on behalf of something loved, something whose loss is equivalent to the destruction not only of the entire past, but of the future as well.

Platonov's own future was largely foreclosed in 1931. He was publicly accused by RAPP luminaries of being soft on kulaks, and when Stalin himself looked over a story called "For Future Use," he wrote in its margins, "Talented, but a bastard."

Although Platonov never heard on his door what he called "the sharp rap of an official hand," he was not allowed to publish for several years, and when he returned to print it was as a more cautious writer, deliberately a socialist realist. His most severe punishment came in the form of the arrest of his son in 1938. The boy, only fifteen, was alleged to be an "anti-Soviet youth terrorist." Eventually Mikhail Sholokhov interceded, and the boy was released from the camps during the war. He returned home ill with tuberculosis, from which he died in 1943. Platonov himself became infected while nursing his son and died from tuberculosis in 1951. By that date, he had once again been banned from print, this time for publishing "Homecoming." The story, included in *The Fierce and Beautiful World*, concerns a soldier's recognition of his duty as a father and a husband, but was deemed unflattering to the Soviet family. Where Platonov's earlier work, especially *Chevengur*, had fastened its mad hopefulness not only to the red juggernaut but to "all the poor, rejected objects, all the small, unknown, forgotten things," his work was now domesticated; "Homecoming" is a modest, humane, and profoundly conservative story of the abiding hearth. Still, in the end, even the home was no home, not for literature or life—one of the lessons, perhaps, of Platonov's career.

It even seems fitting that Platonov should die of a communicable disease. He had always been, above all, *susceptible*: he was a writer who took dictation from events; and it is his prose's "empathetic infection with the speech habits" of his characters, as Thomas Seifrid says, that makes it especially remarkable in the original. Soviet ideology was, of course, a kind of Prometheanism: the Soviet Union would find its happiness and distinction in being a society of makers, remaking itself. But Platonov became the great writer of the Stalinist period, not by celebrating work in the manner of Fedor

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Gladkov's *Cement*, but by opening himself unreservedly, with no instrument but his "precise child's heart," to suffering—which is the opposite of making and doing. In *The Foundation Pit*, Voschev says, "Man will make a building and unmake himself. Who will live in it then?"

THE GARGANTUAN Proletarian Home of *The Foundation Pit* is never built; and so it takes its place with Vladimir Tatlin's Monument for the Third International and Stalin's Palace of Soviets among the great unbuilt structures of Soviet life. Such blueprints are like a tailor's measurements for a bridegroom's suit; they will serve just as well if the young man needs something to be buried in. Hope and disappointment have the same dimensions. Russia in the early twentieth century was a society brimming with dreamers. Marxism—"that sin of optimism," E. M. Cioran called it—naturally found many adherents. Even so, Platonov gorged his heart on hope to a remarkable degree. More important to him than Marx was the nineteenth-century philosopher Nikolai Fedorov, an advocate of the brotherhood of man and the human triumph over nature who also believed in the possibility of a materialist resurrection of the dead. Living people were to gather the scattered remains of their ancestors, who, put back together again, would then enjoy the old by-product of their souls.

Whether or not Platonov literally believed in this idea, Fedorov's *Philosophy of the Common Cause*—which outlined it—was his most cherished book, and one of his characters suggests that Lenin's body has been preserved precisely for the purpose of its imminent resurrection. Other utopians draw their constituency from the living and the yet-to-live; but for Platonov, utopia would be incomplete until even the dead could share in it. They, too, could be rescued by politics and science—"scientific socialism."

*Chevengur*—his only full-length novel—was written on the eve of Stalin's mass collectivization, before Platonov's anxiety for the Soviet and human future overwhelmed him. The civil war is over and, in the village of Chevengur, communism has spontaneously erupted. The Chevengurian peasants are determined to


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overthrow nature—which is to say, the reign of death—and their ambition is unbounded: "As long as any natural raw material goes untouched by human hands, people are far from having invented everything." The people of Chevengur have "one profession, and that is their soul. Instead of trade, we've set up life." The new dispensation extends even to plants and animals. Weeds are declared "international property," and cattle are liberated: "The livestock wants to become people too, you know!"

Of course, this is ridiculous and often sinister. Reading *Chevengur* is like listening to Mahler: a noble-sounding theme will become queasily corrupted into the sarcasm and cliché it contained all along. *Chevengur* is a wildly ambiguous book. Susceptible Platonov seems prey to all points of view. Soviet communism is wonderful: a triumph over nature, it allows peasants with their "home-made" faces to realize their homemade dreams. Soviet communism is premature: there is no one to carry it out but a partnership of doctrinaires and ignoramuses ("What are those words, the ones that can't be understood? Dermatology, or something?" "Terminology," comes the answer). Soviet communism is a nightmare: it makes use of jargon constantly and massacre occasionally ("oppressive elements" are "ushered into posthumous life in an organized and healthy fashion"). Or, finally, Soviet communism enforces, in one of two ways, what Ernst Bloch called "the tragedy of fulfillment." Either, like any true utopia, it solves all soluble problems, but leaves people still with bodies that suffer and time that passes. Or it is tragic because real existing socialism is the wrong fulfillment of the right dream; it cashiers the idea of utopia that had animated people's lives as they dreamed their way through poverty, and leaves the mind as barren as the world.

*The Foundation Pit*—Platonov's next and last novel—is set in a world barren of meaning save for travestied meaning. It makes its unique indictment of Stalinism by reversing Fedorov's dream of resurrection: instead of rescuing the dead from their limbo, workers are conscripted into the common grave. The character of this travesty, and the others, cannot be conveyed in English. There is no good way for English to reproduce the effect of peasant speech meeting hackneyed Soviet jargon and curdling on contact, much less of duplicating a pun like Platonov's *samooblozhenie* (the term, used to explain how the village has purchased some coffins, means both "voluntary taxation" and "self-burial"). Platonov's standing among Russians is based above all on the eccentric language of his work up to 1931, before he accommodated himself to the canons of socialist realism. He had very able translators in Mirra Ginsburg, Robert Chandler, and Anthony Olcott, but English editions of his books can, at best, paraphrase a heartbreak.

THE SEVEN stories in *The Fierce and Beautiful World* are lovely, severe, and humane, but they are easier than Platonov's best work. They are easier to translate, to read, and—probably for Soviet officials and American readers alike—to accept. Most of them appeared in a translated collection put out by the Soviets in 1972, fifteen years before *The Foundation Pit* would be published for the first time in the Soviet Union. The introduction to that volume, praising "healthy, straightforward" Platonov for his theme of "the moral regeneration of man in the process of revolutionary transformation," is a whitewash in red. But these stories almost permit such a treatment. In "Fro" (1936), a young wife reconciles herself to her husband's indefinite absences as he works to construct socialism in the Far East. "The Third Son" (1936) is a tale of filial piety, as best embodied by a communist son; Ernest Hemingway admired it for the clarity and directness of its style. In "Aphrodite" (1945), a young engineer reaffirms his unrequited love for two associated beauties: a woman who has left him and a glorious Soviet future still in the offing.

The writing in *The Fierce and Beautiful World* is not astonishing in the way of *Chevengur* and *The Foundation Pit*. In story after story, the keynote is resignation. But it would be unjust, critically and morally, to consider this simply the result of political accommodation. Platonov's artistic imperative must have been the practical imperative of any number of Soviet citizens: to withdraw hope from history and politics at large, and to confine it to the house, the marriage, the job. In "The River Potudan (1937)," Nikita is at last capable

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of making love to his wife, but "he did not find from loving Lyuba intimately any higher happiness that he had usually known—he felt only that his heart was now in charge of his whole body and could divide his blood with his poor but necessary pleasure." Not much, but it will have to be enough. As Louis Aragon (also a communist) wrote during World War II: "*Parlez d'amour car tout le reste est crime.*" Much of Platonov's work is intensely fearful of sex, as if his people were virgins saving themselves for the world-historical equivalent of true love. To settle down, then—in the botched world of Stalinism—to sex and fatherhood and domesticity amounts to a sane and dispiriting admission that this is the best one is likely to get.

BUT THESE remarks hardly apply to the best story in *The Fierce and Beautiful World*. *Dhzan* is not, in fact, a story at all, but a novella or miniature epic, and its inclusion here alone justifies the book's reissue. The *dhzan* are a dwindling, listless people of Turkmenistan, so demoralized by their poverty that the neighboring Khans cannot even use them as slaves, "because they no longer had that small desire to live which is essential even for a slave." The novella is remarkable above all for its inescapably literal and allegorical depiction of their poverty:

> At first the mosquitoes ate the people so badly that they tore the skin off their bones, but after a little time their blood became used to mosquitoes' poison and began to develop an antidote from which the mosquitoes became helpless and fell to the ground. Because of this the mosquitoes were now afraid of people, and would not come near them at all.
>
> Some of the people had settled apart from each other, in order not to suffer for others when there was nothing to eat, and in order not to have to weep when people close to them died. But some of the people lived in families; in these cases they had nothing but their love one for another, because they had neither good food, nor hope for the future, nor any other happiness to distract them, and their hearts grew so weak that they could only love for a wife or for a husband, which is the most helpless, poor and everlasting of all feelings.

Nazar Chagatayev, a *dhzan* himself and his people's would-be rescuer, has more promiscuous ambitions of happiness—"Grief seemed to him something vulgar, and he was determined to build a happy world in his fatherland because otherwise he couldn't understand what to do with his life, or how to exist"—but they are to no avail. Returned from Moscow, he shepherds the starving *dhzan* on a long march to socialism, which proves a temporary haven of staple foods, medicine, and lantern fuel. (One recalls Adorno's remark: "There is only tenderness in the coarsest demand: that no-one shall go hungry anymore.") But the flock is incurably nomadic, and its members wander away from socialism "one by one to all the countries of the world." Nothing else Platonov wrote is so painfully ambiguous, implying at once the necessity and the impossibility of socialism, rebuking reforming intellectuals as well as lamenting the intractability of the masses. And no other story in *The Fierce and Beautiful World* concerns a hero who is even capable of political disappointment.

The collection's other heroes are resigned to the hoped-for happiness of romantic love, "the most helpless, poor and everlasting of all feelings." It is striking that the reduced, straitened quality of Platonov's later work—offering domestic life as a refuge from the wreck of utopia—is a quality shared with much of our contemporary writing, without our sensing, most of the time, that there is any reduction or straitening involved.

In 1995, Vivian Gornick, arguing that the power of romantic love "to break the bonds of the frightened, ignorant self" could no longer be believed in, announced "the end of the novel of love." This was too optimistic. Romantic love is still the usual grail, and "domestic realism" the customary mode, in fiction and elsewhere. When it is a question of finding an asylum for our affections, the choice for most of us, to put it crudely, is between narcissism and the *égoisme à deux* of romantic love. The withdrawal of political will from public life is followed by a withdrawal of psychological resources as well, and we come to define our self-interest as narrowly as possible. Constructive, eudaemonistic Eros—"builder of cities," according to Auden—is relegated to mere sexuality. Where Eros might have sought satisfaction far and wide, the hope of pleasure and the instinct of play are instead fas-


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tidiously compartmentalized, finding their object mostly in the bedroom and at the margins of the day. Having no role in the workplace or public life, Eros is placed under a kind of house arrest. Part of the fascination of Platonov's career is the chance it affords to witness this withdrawal, this bleak homecoming, as it takes place.

The only major Soviet writer of working-class origin, Platonov wrote of, and from, a collectivity we can hardly imagine in our time. His mercurial and many-voiced style has neither the defenses nor the confinement of a well-established ego. His later retreat, in style and subject matter, was a political necessity, and probably an artistic and psychological one, too. It is his early work, written when it still seemed—hope against hope—that a large realm of freedom might be wrested from the realm of necessity, that makes him such a singular writer. This singularity (and all Russian commentators remark on Platonov's lack of real literary ancestors or heirs) has to do with his native genius. But Tatyana Tolstaya's image of him, in her introduction to *The Fierce and Beautiful World*, as "an angel"—"let us be grateful that such creatures sometimes visit our world"—is a mystification. It isn't that wombs aren't manufacturing angels any more; it's that politics no longer promises them any fit terrestrial accommodation. This means angelic souls are saved from the kind of savage disappointment Platonov underwent, along with millions of others. But it also means the quiet triumph of a meagerness called realism—realism the literary mode and realism the resigned daily attitude. To praise the utopian spirit in this way may have an ugly ring at a time when *utopia* sounds to many ears like a codeword for mass murder—as indeed Platonov's writing showed that it could be—but there is clearly little place on earth for angels when there is none for heaven. ●

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BENJAMIN KUNKEL has contributed reviews to the *Nation*, the *Village Voice*, and the *Los Angeles Times*.


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## Left Responses to Globalization

Editors:

The symposium on "How Should the Left Respond to Globalization?" (Winter 2001) leaves out some key ideas that have emerged from discussions among the transnational groups of protesters who have filled both the streets and public meeting spaces to resist corporate-led globalization. Indeed, the immensity of the corporate globalization project demands more transformative proposals than some of the *Dissent* contributors propose. Within the protester discussions, one finds some degree of international consensus around several key goals:

First, the net flow of financial resources from poor to rich countries should be stopped immediately. Third world debt should be canceled along lines similar to those proposed by the Jubilee 2000 Campaign (see www.jubilee2000uk.org). Debt cancellation should not be tied to the extensive conditions that have thus far prevented the most heavily indebted countries from receiving the relief that rich countries have already agreed to.

Second, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) must end structural adjustment lending. Structural adjustment programs have diverted the resources of poor countries away from basic needs such as education and health care as they ostensibly promote (usually unsuccessfully) fiscal stability.

Third, the World Trade Organization (WTO), along with the World Bank and IMF must be scaled back to a fraction of their current size or abolished altogether. Without profound transformation, these institutions will continue to help further concentrate wealth and devastate the ecology, as many years of economic and environmental trend data show. Although the AFL-CIO might support a WTO with a labor side agreement (see Thea Lee's essay in the symposium), solidarity with workers in the developing world demands firm opposition to any proposals that would strengthen the WTO. U.S. labor must join workers around the world to resist the continued disenfranchisement of poor countries and their people from the global political economy.

Finally, the global financial system must be democratized. Two specific changes would make this possible. First, the legal constructs that enable corporations to exist must be redefined. The corporate charter has provided a legal basis for corporations to act as "natural persons" in the court of law, allowing them to demand the same rights as all living, breathing citizens while they socialize many of the human and ecological costs of corporate-driven production. Much of the twentieth century shows that when "Citizen GE" enters the "democratic" political playing field, "Joe and Jane Citizen" don't stand a chance of having much voice in government. Similarly, when transnational corporations enter the global political field, they undermine the sovereignty of (poor) states and further erode the possibilities for citizens to effectively advocate for public interests.

A second transformation would be to subordinate the Bretton Woods Institutions (World Bank, IMF, and later the WTO) to the United Nations, as is stipulated in the UN Charter. Institutions designed to promote profit-seeking and trade-oriented development models cannot be allowed to continue driving the global political economy. The United Nations must first be democratized to curtail the disproportionate influence of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (especially the United States) and to allow greater accountability of the institution to both national elected officials and to citizens. Proposals for a world parliament or citizens' assembly have been circulating since the dawn of the United Nations, and the idea has support even among the powerful. Once steps toward even limited democratization are taken to promote popular legitimacy and accountability of the United Nations and to ensure that no superpower can wield undue influence, the United Nations should be substantially strengthened so that it can effectively carry out its mandate of promoting collective goods, such as a clean and sustainable ecosystem, universal access to basic human needs (including patented medicines), and the right to a decent work life that provides a living wage. These goals are already recognized in the Conventions of the United Nations and the International Labor Organization. But the corporate elite has worked to ensure that these institutions lack the enforcement capacities they need while they advanced a trade regime with the strongest multilateral enforcement body of any global institution.

The left should work to reverse corporate-led globalization and replace it with a globalization consisting of solidarity, human dignity, and sustainability.

JACKIE SMITH
*Huntington Station, N.Y.*


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Editors:

Each of the five contributors to your Winter 2001 symposium on globalization offered thoughtful and creative proposals. However, no one mentioned the relevance of the power of the American presidency to the question you posed.

With the Republicans now holding the reins of presidential power, any prospects for reforming the global economy look dim at best. The "good news" is that less than four years from now, the presidency will be up for grabs. It is not inconceivable that the Democratic primaries may feature a serious contender who actively supports at least some key elements of a progressive agenda.

In short, the left needs to keep its "eyes on the prize" of the White House. Its occupant can wield enormous influence over the architecture of the global economy. Incorporating a principled and pragmatic (they need not be mutually exclusive) electoral strategy into our overall response to globalization should be of the highest strategic importance for the left.

KEN BROCINER
*Somerville, Mass.*

Editors:

The analyses in your Winter 2001 issue by Chang, Faux, Lee, and Pereira shed considerable light on globalization. As Marx suggested, one possible result of capitalism is a single society that encompasses the world, a society that requires a single polity. The issue before us is the nature of that polity: who makes the decisions in it?

The disappointing aspect of these analyses is the authors' continued reliance on the legal fiction called the state and the suggestion that the one-state, one-vote general assembly is "more democratic" than other international institutions. *Contra* Chang, democracy in world affairs does not mean that San Marino and India have equal weight in decision making. It means that the citizens of India and the citizens of San Marino have like weight, just as democracy in the United States means that a citizen of Wyoming and a citizen of California should have like weight. As the American example shows (think of the U.S. Senate or Electoral College), this goal may have to be compromised for prudential reasons. One may accept a situation in which Iceland and San Marino outvote India in one venue, but surely there must be venues in which nine hundred million Indians far outweigh citizens of Iceland and San Marino combined.

An unwillingness to extend the concept of citizenship beyond the state, to trust the person living in territory flying a different flag, has meant that decisions at the international level belong to elites with only the most tenuous ties to ordinary citizens. There is no international equivalent of the House of Representatives (with members elected on a population basis) or even of the Senate (set up on an entity basis but directly elected). The agreement of U.S. and Jordanian officials to observe "basic labor standards" is welcome, but is no substitute for the citizens of a U.S.-Jordanian single market determining by democratic process what their common standards should be.

No market can exist without rules. What we are in danger of getting is the nineteenth-century "night watchman" state, which is only able to protect property. If Canada, the United States, and Mexico are to form a single market, as Delaware, New York, and Texas have come to form a single market, this requires common rules on matters such as labor and the environment. "Rules that concern all should be made by all." Only in this way can a market be created that is free for labor as well as for capital and goods.

STEPHEN OREN
*Chicago, Ill.*

Editors:

The justification for globalization is that it achieves economies of scale, and thus opposing it identifies one as a narrow nationalist. But the dilemma contains a fallacy; namely, that a reasonably efficient economy must include the whole world. There is a third way between the extremes of nationalism and globalism, and that is regionalism. If a region is large enough to permit effective production, it is sufficient, and furthermore offers the advantage of better understanding of regional circumstances—but it contravenes the program of the globalists.

JOSEPH M. DIAMOND
*Brooklyn, N.Y.*

## Half the World?

Editors:

Susan George ("Another World Is Possible," Winter 2001) refers to three billion people—"half the world"—making less than two dollars per day. In the January-February issue of *Foreign Affairs*, an article says that "some two billion people" earn less than two dollars per day. The difference between three billion and "some two billion" means either that one of these statements is wrong or that the available income figures are so imprecise that they can be interpreted in strikingly different ways. Of course, either number represents a moral calamity.

LOUIS F. COOPER
*Wheaton, Md.*

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## The Editors Reply

The World Bank's *World Development Report 2000/2001* says that 2.8 billion people live on less than two dollars per day. The UN Development Program says that 1.3 billion people live on less than one dollar per day. As Louis Cooper says, these figures represent a moral calamity.

## Great Crimes and "Just War"

Editors:

Three points occurred to me that seem relevant to the Laurie Calhoun-Michael Walzer discussion of just war ("Violence and Hypocrisy," Winter 2001). First is the matter of contingent and predicate acts that inevitably are stuck like bloody gum to the boots of even potentially favorite just wars. Take Pol Pot and the Cambodian genocide. Certainly, the long chain of events that followed upon the reassertion, with American support, of French colonial power in Indochina after World War II leaves a bloody trail we can easily follow. This is a path that starts with a betrayal of both real anti-Axis allies and the ideals of freedom for captive nations for which the war was supposedly fought; passes through a couple of decades of intervention, neocolonialism, corrupt client regimes, revolution, war, bombing, defoliation, invasion; and leads us into the killing fields of Cambodia and the invasion by the Vietnamese Army.

Counterfactual history has its difficulties, but it's more than reasonable, in almost all cases, to conclude that just as great fortunes arise from a great crime, so do just wars. Certainly, it should not be hard to see that the Cambodian misery and genocide were contingent upon more than a few horrific and preventable acts by the French and then by the Americans and our allies. Yes, it's good that the Vietnamese stopped the genocide. But only by being oblivious to the river of blood that surrounded and created the Cambodian killing fields could you call anything that happened "just." It was at that final, and preventable, point necessary.

Second is the role of nonviolence and nonmilitary defense. Active nonviolence, noncooperation, boycotts, sabotage, withdrawal of consent, and use of counter-institutions have proven often to be effective weapons of the weak against aggressors, empires, tyrants, and totalitarian regimes. Compare, for example, the disciplined and effective Kosovar nonviolent resistance to the Milosevic regime to the consequences of the Kosovo Liberation Army's violent insurgency that led us into another of our just wars, that is, the one we just had.

Again, when and how such resistance is organized is crucial. If, for example, a complete international boycott of Nazi Germany had been undertaken as soon as Hitler's policies became clear in the 1930s, before successful Nazi remilitarization, what came next would likely have been quite different.

From the standpoint of a nonviolent activist and political theorist, I am not suggesting that there is never evil copious enough to justify the use of force. I am saying that in almost all cases the practice of nonviolence, combined with the pursuit of peace and justice by democratic regimes, will mitigate and minimize the need for military measures. If democracies such as the United States act as imperial powers, military behemoths, and arms merchants to the world, it should be no surprise that just war will follow just war. In any case, nonviolent activists will continue to act in the circumstances we find ourselves.

Third, I will conclude by noting that in the twenty-first century, it is more than just desirable, but necessary as a matter of self-interest, to pursue global policies that lead to sustainability and ecological survival. That path is one of democratization, demilitarization, peace, and justice. But that is a matter of dynamics that are far from that of war, just or otherwise.

Roy Morrison
*Warner, N.H.*

## J-P Was Right

Editors:

I've received the new issue of *Dissent* (Winter 2001) and am reading it (and re-reading it) as I write. Whoever the editor was who decided to publish the articles of Jean-Paul Sartre—all published in Europe during a major conflict (ideological and actual) of our entire planet—deserves praise. Our times are strangely reminiscent, not only of the events of the forties, but also of the events surrounding "America" and its founding.

Our wages (and the multiple deductions therefrom) fuel this nation. We who work, we who produce, we who make actual the ideas of so many, we ought to remember this is ours, not theirs.

My commendation to *Dissent* for publishing these valuable thoughts and observations of J.-P. S. Let the debates—and yes, the arguments—begin.

Bruce Hoegg
*By E-mail*

## Where Are Student Activists?

Editors:

Although I am glad Marshall Berman is hopeful about


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the future of some kids whose school was shut down ("Crossing Swords: Trees Growing in Brooklyn," Summer 2000), I would be more hopeful if he had told us that those kids and their community had put up a fight to save it.

The trend described by Maxine Phillips on "The Last Page" (Fall 2000) is badly in need of organized community opposition.

In Portland, Oregon, the school system is making noises about shutting down schools, probably exclusively in poorer neighborhoods. Although ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) and the New Party have launched a campaign against these possible closings, it would be good to see some student activists created by this fight and great to see a national movement develop.

I look forward to reading in future issues of *Dissent* some good ideas on promoting such student and community efforts.

DAVID SWANSON
*Orange, Va.*

## Skeptical about GMOs

Editors:

I would expect to find a treatment of genetically modified organisms (GMO) like that of Elof Axel Carlson ("Genetically Altered Organisms," Winter 2001) from many publications but was disappointed to encounter it in *Dissent*. Carlson places GMO foods in the respectable tradition of Luther Burbank, reviews the "fears, legitimate and illegitimate," and concludes that our policy toward such foods should be "monitor, debate, regulate." Could any corporate PR department ask for more from a leading journal of "the left"?

Although humans have used breeding techniques to modify their food sources for millennia, there are three unique factors in the current situation. First is the ease with which scientists can make genetic alterations to plants and animals. Second is the incredibly wide range of potential alterations. And third is the control of these technologies by big corporations whose priorities are dictated by profits not by concern for public health, social well-being, or ecological sustainability. These corporations have the ability to overwhelm regulatory apparatus, bring new organisms quickly to market, and to introduce them on a global scale. Food-safety activists are wise to demand a cautious approach.

Carlson makes the bizarre claim that "unease" about agribusiness is a "sudden" (that is, recent) phenomenon. However, anyone with a passing knowledge of American history knows that resistance to agribusiness goes back at least as far as the Populist movement of the 1890s. He cites our history of "welcoming" the efficiencies of agribusiness while overlooking the genuine fears about the American diet that, over the past quarter century, have led to organic products becoming the growth sector of the food industry.

Finally, Carlson's glib confidence in our regulatory agencies is laughable to anyone who understands their function. Carlson's entire piece reads like a neoliberal apology for the GMO industry. Does it belong in *Dissent*? I don't think so.

DAN COLEMAN
*Chapel Hill, N.C.*

## The Editors Reply

The editors of *Dissent* disagree among themselves about Elof Axel Carlson's piece, as they disagree about many of the pieces we publish. Surely, Dan Coleman doesn't read *Dissent* looking only for arguments that he agrees with. There has always been a strong current on the left that welcomes technological advance as well as a current that is suspicious of it. We will continue this argument in our pages.

### To Letter Writers

- *We welcome succinct letters from our readers. But because we have a long lead time for each issue, you have to send us your letter within three weeks of getting an issue of* Dissent *in order to get it into the next issue.*

- ***Letters must be no more than 500 words**, typed, double-spaced, and carry the full address and name of the sender. We reserve the right to edit letters down to fit our space and to choose which shall be printed. We are unable to acknowledge letters. Letters will not be returned to senders unless they are accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. We accept E-mail submissions to editors@dissentmagazine.org, but request that you also provide a street address.*

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What is going on? The richest Americans are about to give themselves a big tax cut. The bigger the cut, the less money there will be for government programs that many less-than-rich Americans need. Ordinary greed is at work here, but also ideology. The proposal of the new administration is designed to starve the government as well as to increase the income gap. So why isn't there more opposition? This is a pocketbook issue. It's the economy, stupid. Don't people still have nerve endings in their wallets? Politics is supposed to have, so we were always taught, a material base. Obviously it still does: the rich have material motives. But the rest of us seem to be...what? materially anesthetized. How was this accomplished?

The economic downturn is starting to bring "welfare reform" home across America. Many Americans are at the end of their entitlements; the help that was once available isn't there anymore; for some of them it's not just that the safety net has holes; the net has simply been taken down, folded up, put away, like the flag at the end of the day. So, why isn't anybody screaming? Where are the protests, the organized anger?

Work safety rules established in the last weeks of the Clinton administration have been disestablished by a congressional majority that consists of all the Republicans and maybe 10 percent or 15 percent of the Democrats. The GOP has discovered solidarity and democratic centralism; the Democrats are weak and divided, a party of (as we used to say) renegades. Why is no one outraged? The Republican whips carry whips; the Democrats plead for the support of their own members.

A student takes one of his parent's guns, shoots up his high school, killing and wounding many of his fellows. Everyone is shocked. But everyone has been shocked before. The killings give no impetus to efforts to control the sale and use of guns. The people who want to do that are still around. The National Rifle Association and its lobbyists are still around. And between these two, among the people we call "the people," there is no agitation, discussion, movement. Why not?

Immediately upon coming into office, Bush II shut off all U.S. aid to clinics abroad that give counseling about or actually provide abortions. Sympathy with third world women should have produced a fierce response. And if not that, then self-interest. Obviously, this is what Bush would like to do at home, too. Where is the feminist militancy of yesteryear? Don't the Democrats remember the gender gap?

There is a two-fold answer to all these questions. First, in America today the Republicans are the party of conviction; the Democrats are the party of sentiment and opportunism. Some residual feeling for poorer and weaker citizens survives among rank-and-file Democrats; they are still the local party of the left. But the feeling isn't ideologically defined and reinforced. The Republicans, by contrast, have a doctrine; they know what they want, and the certainty of their knowledge provides the internal discipline necessary for the pursuit of what they want.

Second, the Republicans have real grassroots strength in the provinces, organizational energy; the Democrats have media celebrities and the dingy remains of a few urban machines. Yes, they have union support, which came close to carrying Gore to victory. But, again, our local party of the left, because it has no ideology, also has no cadres. Like the Oakland in Gertrude Stein's cruel imagination, there's no there there. All sorts of militant associations feed into the GOP; the Democrats are, for the moment at least, bereft of associational vitality.

It's not that people don't have reasons to protest, argue, and organize. It's that there is no political framework within which they can find one another and make sense of what they have to do. Until we can construct a frame, politics for the left will continue to be a shameful series of surrenders.

Junius


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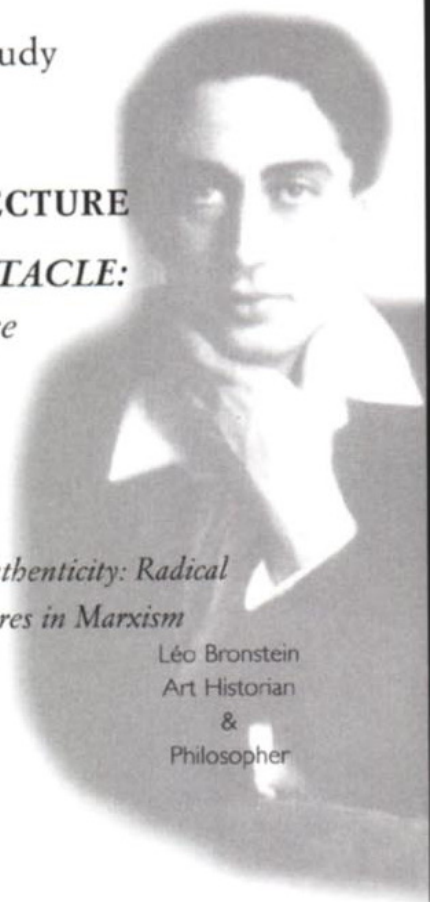

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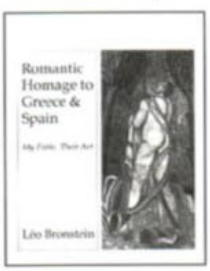


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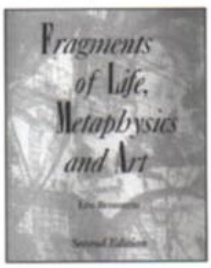


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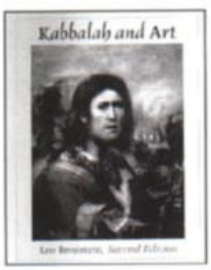


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